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CORDUROY CHARLIE, THE BOY BRAVO; Or, Deadwood Dick's Last Act.

BY EDWARD L. WHEELER.



THEN CHARLIE SPRUNG ASIDE QUICKLY, AND STRUCK THE BEAR A TERRIBLE BLOW WITH THE
KNIFE IN THE BACK OF THE NECK.

Corduroy Charlie, THE BOY BRAVO;

OR,

Deadwood Dick's Last Act.

BY EDWARD L. WHEELER,

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CHAPTER I.

THE MASQUERADE—A LITTLE ILLUSTRATION OF WHAT
COURAGE AMOUNTS TO.

NIGHT, with a wild storm brooding upon its bosom, was hovering over the entire Black Hills and National Park country—night, as black as the darkest hues of the raven's wing, and a storm which had gathered upon the heavens in giant force, and threatened every minute to burst and dash its waters down in torrents over the gold-veined hills and in the rugged face of Nature!

A winding mountain dug-way or stage-road led down into a pine-encircled gulch, where nestled Quartz City—an infant colony and mining town of no particular repute or importance—a sort of way-station between the Hills proper and the National Park or American Wonderland, where a few sanguine souls had dropped off. Some quartz rock had been found and a "pay-streak" of sand, which had induced the pioneers to stay in the little vale, where the evergreen pines furnished an emerald border to the beds of flowers that grew and bloomed in wild luxuriance.

Quartz City was no Deadwood, no Whoop-Up, nor Hayard in size, but yet on a small scale represented all the attractions of the above towns, with its throng of people in the vale, and a few stores, saloons, dance-houses, and gambling-dens. Of this class of buildings there were, perhaps, a score, on the immediate banks of Castle Creek. The rest of the town was scattered all over the valley in unconnected confusion, with no regularity as to line or appearance—log and slab cabins predominating.

But a short distance to the southwest rolled the famous Park country, while to the northwest Inyan Karas, 6,500 feet of altitude, loomed up above all its neighbor peaks; while to the east, north and south stretched the golden country of flowers and rocks, with its cascades and streams, and beautiful valleys, where encroaching civilization is fast settling a district which promises at no far distant day to be as fair a land as there is under the sun.

But night over Quartz City and the placer-mines of Castle Creek lends no enchanting effect to the beauties of nature—rather urges the weary pedestrian, a youth lacking but one year of majority, to descend the rugged dug-way trail into the little town, where many lights are twinkling out of the gloom as if to welcome him. Close behind him comes a Chinaman, mounted upon an ugly pack-mule; then, still in the rear of that animal, follow two more of a like species, harnessed to a "schooner" wagon, and driven by a large, greasy-looking red-skin.

What the wagon contains aside from the red-skin is not apparent, because of the closely-shirred curtains of canvas; but the youth in advance occasionally gives a glance of inquiry back in the direction of the jolting wagon, as if to assure himself that the Indian bullwhacker had not fallen asleep.

Slowly the night caravan wound down into the vale, and drew up before a row of brilliantly-lighted stores, where wares and all manner of goods were offered for sale.

Once in the light of several lamp-reflectors, the youthful leader of the caravan was better seen for description. He was of medium stature, with strong, wiry limbs and massive chest; a figure for a gladiator was his, with a prominence in swelling muscles and tensely-drawn cords. Clad from the chin to his knee-boots in corduroy, he still showed the striking beauty of his muscular form.

In face he was prepossessing, if not what the critic would call really handsome. It was a full, intellectual face, shorn of all beard—a face with firm, resolute mouth, and eyes that could flash fire of enthusiasm or anger from their depths of brown; a forehead high and clear, with clustering curls of brown as a border, which waved back over a fine-shaped head, and fell in a mass upon the broad, firm shoulders.

A slouch hat, a belt of weapons, and a rifle completed the outfit or costume of the youth, whom it is our purpose to take for a chief character in a romance from the peculiar life in the hills of the country of gold.

The little caravan had halted almost before a tavern which stood adjoining one of the dry-goods stores, over the door of which was the cheerful German sign,

"THE BIG SCHOONER!"

Several men, who had been standing outside the door as Corduroy Charlie came up, stepped forward and peered sharply into the new-comer's face. They were all swarthy, evil-looking fellows, attired in buckskin and armed to the teeth—men, evidently, whose motives were never of the best, and who would swoop upon their prey even as the hawk darts upon its smaller game.

"Hello, boys! w'at hev we here?" ejaculated one—a burly, bloated wretch, with heavy mustache and goatee. "Looks like a green 'un, eh—a sort o' tender-fut, ye see! Sayee, Johnny, w'ich way does yer compass p'in?"

"None o' yer big-headed galoot's bizness!" replied Corduroy, stepping aside and attempting to pass. But the ruffians blockaded his path, with a series of horrible chuckles.

"No yer don't, sonny!" the former spokesman interposed, with a grin of evil delight. "Don't ye go an' git so fast, an' I'll be merciful ter ye. Suppose ye nevyer heerd o' me, did ye?—old Jem McTurk, ther bullwhacker prince. A sort o' nabob, ye see, who kin lick his weight in stage-drivers or pilgrim toughs, you chalk et!"

"I care not who you are; get out of my path an' let me pass, or"—and the young stranger laid his right hand toward his belt—"I'll put a death-spot inter your anatomy so quick that ye can't tell what struck ye!"

"Ho! ho! D'ye heer the young bil'y-goat talk, boyees? D'ye heer him ba-a-a, old Monk Morgan?" and McTurk rested his hands upon his large hips, his arms akimbo. "Whoop-la! did ever any mortal pilgrim see the eka?"

"I say, Corduroy, whar'd ye git them togs? Steal 'em?" put in the rough whom McTurk had addressed as Monk Morgan.

To these words Corduroy Charlie made no remarks, but stepped back a few paces with flashing eyes. The light from the shop windows streamed back into the middle of the street where he stood; he took a heavy gold watch from his pocket, and glanced at it a moment thoughtfully.

"Ten o'clock!" he muttered, with a glance up and down the street, "and no hope of getting a decent bunk in any of these dens, probably."

He stepped back to the wagon occupied by the Indian driver on the seat.

"Drive on into the valley, Bad Medicine, to where the cabins are not thick, and unhitch the mules and let 'em graze. Be sure you and Clever Sam watch the wagon close, and if inquisitive visitors come, send them about their business. D'ye hear?"

"Ugh! Bad Medicine hear ebberry time."

Then the wagon moved along up the street into the heart of the valley, the Chinaman riding meekly in advance, and surveying the scene with wide-open almond-shaped eyes as he rode. When a bend in the street had hidden the wagon from his view, Corduroy Charlie turned once more toward the tavern where the roughs still stood, eying him grimly. He was aware that for some unaccountable reason they had fixed upon him a grudge, or a desire to annoy him and excite a quarrel, but he determined not to be bluffed in the outset, coming, as he did, a stranger into the mines.

Accordingly he advanced with a firm step, one hand resting near the belt, and the other carrying his rifle. Contrary to his expectation, the roughs stepped to one side and allowed him to pass into the tavern.

After he had gone, McTurk turned to the one of his companions who went under the name of Monk Morgan.

"Monk, did ye ever see that galoot?" he demanded, as he pointed back over his shoulder toward the interior of the "Big Schooner."

"Ther boy?—no. Who ar' he?"

"Thet's fer us ter find out, an' report ter headquarters. The boy's no slouch, you chalk e', an' ef he ain't our game, ye may shute me. Sez ther boss ter me, t'other day, sez he—'McTurk, ef ye see a young feller cum aroun' as is in ther least suspicious watch out fer him an' report on him. He may be wanted.' Wal, thet applies ter yonder galoot, as is inside, tho' mebbe he ain't ther one ther boss wants. Anyhow, thar's meat fer us ter pick. Ye see'd ther wagon w'at the red-skin driv'?"

"You bet, an' a quare looker ware thet same red-skin."

"Wal, the young feller's got somethin' precious in thar, mark et—a gal, I reckon, or gold, or sumthin' else. So while I sail inside, you foller ther wagon an' spook around."

Monk Morgan nodded, and, followed by his companions, set out up the street, while McTurk entered the tavern.

The Big Schooner, kept by a sturdy Dutchman, whom the miners had christened Pretzel Pete, was the only creditable concern in the town, so far as size was concerned. It had been erected out of rough boards, sixty feet front and ninety feet in depth—the largest affair of the kind in the Black Hills.

Pretzel Pete had come to Quartz City direct from Pittsburg, Pa., with a pocketful of money, and an open eye to business—had erected his tavern, and started into business, with music—for a German band played the good old airs of Rhineland in Peter's establishment the whole of every afternoon and evening.

But a little space was reserved for the bar and gambling-tables; the rest of the lower part of the Big Schooner was turned into a ball-room.

And, here, to-night, a grand Masked Ball was to be given; consequently the town, and especially Pretzel Pete's place, were crowded with men and women from all parts of the Hills—for couriers had spread the news far and wide, and the stages had and were still bringing in their crowds.

After Corduroy Charlie entered the tavern, he purchased some cigars at the bar, and sauntered back into the ball-room, where a great crowd had already assembled—men in red shirts and stogy boots, some with hats, some without—women in costumes calculated not to impede their graceful motion in the dance, with pink stockings and slippers; some of them wore silks and jewels, while others were scantily dressed: it was a commingling of wealth and poverty, of the clean and the unclean.

Corduroy Charlie sauntered around through the room, surveying each face with a sharp scrutiny.

But in all the crowd he saw not one he knew, for masks were worn without exception, by both males and females. It was a strange sea of masked faces,

some of them simple dominoes, while others were grotesque and horrible.

At last the German band struck up a lively overture, and the floor managers began to form the sets for the opening dance.

Standing aloof from the crowd, leaning idly against the wall, Corduroy Charlie ran his eye over the crowd, curiously, as he puffed his cigar.

"Humph! a queer crowd," he soliloquized, half-aloud, a strange expression upon his young face—"a startling picture of all phases of life. Ha! excuse me, ma'am—was it to me you were speaking?" and he turned at the sound of a voice, to a masked person who had approached him—a young woman, evidently, judging from the shape, which was fitted to a trifle in a suit of gray clothing, while only a fair chin, neck, and a bit of the snowy shoulders were visible below the mask, and a wealth of dark-brown hair upon the head and shoulders.

"Certainly I was speaking to you, sir!" replied the merry, musical voice from beneath the mask. "You seemed all alone, and a stranger here, and I wanted to ask you if you wouldn't honor me with the first dance?"

"Eh, dance?" Charlie ejaculated, gazing down at the charming figure in surprise. "Why, I hadn't thought of such a thing, miss. Besides, dancing ain't one of my specialties, you see."

"But that don't signify that you can't dance; so I claim you for the first;" and before Charlie was scarcely aware of it, she had whirled him off into the waltz which the criers had announced.

And the masked partner found that the handsome stranger was fully her equal, and as light as a feather.

When the waltz was over Corduroy Charlie offered her his arm, and led the way toward a row of seats which flanked the ballroom, but, ere he had crossed half of the great floor, he was dealt a blow beside the head which made him reel. But, quickly recovering, he discovered the ruffian bullwhacker, McTurk, standing near.

"Ha! ha!" the fellow laughed. "thet's what ye git fer appropriatin' another galoot's human property!"

"Did you strike me?" Charlie demanded, with a glance around which discovered nothing of his late partner to the dance. "Did you strike me?"

"I allow I hit ye one over ther ear, and I'll do ther repetition, ef ye give me any back talk!" McTurk replied.

"That's all I want to know!" Corduroy replied. "You'll do me a favor by following me into the street, where a settlement can be made!"

And the bullwhacker did follow.

And likewise did the crowd.

A duel was impending!

CHAPTER II.

A STREET DUEL—THE YOUNG BRAVO MEETS A QUEER CUSTOMER—OLD AVALANCHE.

Yes, a duel was to be, within the flowery little vale where nestled Quartz City, sheltered from the mountains' wind—a duel between the acknowledged boss of the town, the valiant bullying McTurk and the young bravo, who was a stranger in the town.

Understand me rightly, dear readers, for in calling Corduroy Charlie a bravo, I do not use Webster's definition of the word, which is a "daring villain;" instead, I use the term as it is frequently, in the far western frontier, applied to brave and fearless characters, who have risked life and faced death—

"And still lived on."

With a firm step, Corduroy led the way into the street, followed by the ruffian McTurk and the whole of the crowd who had but lately tripped the light fantastic within Pretzel Pete's place. Pete was indignant, too, and mounted his bar in high dudgeon to expostulate with the out-going crowd, but it was no use, for they heeded not his cries when a duel was on the call.

In less than five minutes the crowd lined both sides

of the street, and the two men stood in the middle, thirty paces apart, facing each other.

Both chanced to be armed with the same pattern of revolvers—Smith & Wesson's.

Both men seemed confident of victory. McTurk appeared in his element, as he glared around, in triumph.

"I reckon ye wanten lunk out fer thet bullwhacker, young stranger!" spoke a deep base voice, and Charlie looked around to behold a masked man of powerful build, standing close by.

"He owes you no good-will, and will doubtless attempt to kill you, as he is no slouch of a shot."

"Thank you for your advice, but, then, I don't think I need it. I've as good a chance as he, every bit."

A pair of seconds were chosen, and the two men toed the mark.

Corduroy Charlie was perfectly composed, and held his revolver in a steady grasp, its aim not varying the fiftieth part of an inch. McTurk, however, had no such an aim—liquor had upset the steadiness of his nerves, and he was greatly excited.

At a given signal, the duelists fired, the reports of their weapons blending into one, so evenly had they pulled the trigger. McTurk gave a yell of pain—a bullet had torn through the fleshy part of his side, making a painful but not dangerous wound.

Corduroy Charlie had not been hit.

A yell went up from the crowd—especially from the masked giant who stood near the young bravo, and had warned him of the bullwhacker's prowess.

"You did well, young stranger," he cried, approvingly, stroking the long silvery beard which flowed from in under his mask. "Another such a shot a little nearer the heart, will kill the man."

"Which is not my aim!" Charlie replied, recocking his weapon.

Again the white kerchief dropped from the hands of the seconds, and the spiteful crack of the revolvers rung out upon the night, accompanied by a vivid flash.

This time both of the contestants flinched—Corduroy only a trifle, however, while McTurk staggered back a few paces, and fell to the ground, blood oozing from a wound in his right side, opposite the left one.

Charlie had been slightly wounded in the left arm near the shoulder, which rendered his pistol grip for the time useless.

"Are you done, gentlemen?" demanded the seconds, simultaneously. "Are you satisfied, McTurk?"

"Bellerin' pole-cats, yes!" the bullwhacker groaned, from his prostrate position on the ground. "Ther leetle cuss plugged et to me fer more'n I'm wu'th, durn my cats ef he didn't. But, I'll git even wi' him, you bet on't; I'll git even wi' the devil ef et takes till ha'r grows on my eye-teeth, will I!"

"Are you satisfied, young fellow?"

"I reckon so, for the present!" Corduroy Charlie replied, restoring his revolvers to his belt. "But allow me to remark, gentlemen, that though I come here a stranger, I will not be insulted or crowded on, nary a time. Corduroy Charlie's my handle, and so when you want anything of me, just sail in and get accommodated!"

And with a cool laugh, the young bravo pushed his way through the crowd toward Pretzel Pete's establishment. Some of those who had come out to witness the duel followed him back into the tavern, and among them were the silver-bearded giant and the sylph-formed maiden with whom he had danced.

"You are wounded, senor," she said, in soft, kindly tones, as she glided to his side. "You will come with me and let me dress your arm?"

"Eh, where?" Charlie demanded, gazing at her suspiciously, for he could not read her to his satisfaction. "I reckon I can do it, ma'am—"

"No! no! you must come with me," was the reply; and laying a hand upon his uninjured arm, she led the way through a side door, and then along a

path which pointed out into the Garden of Eden, as the beautiful vale had been appropriately named by the miners.

Corduroy Charley followed his strange guide, because he did not know how to refuse with any reasonable excuse.

He was in need of surgical attendance, and knew hardly where to look for his train until day should once more break over the beautiful mountain vale.

They kept along the path and into the dark vale, where here and there lights twinkled from many a cabin window—no word being spoken for some time. The dark waters of Castle Creek were crossed by a foot-bridge; then they came to a cabin which was dark and silent.

"This is my place," Corduroy's guide said, as she unlocked the door and led the way inside, closing the door after them. "Wait a moment and I will procure a light."

She fumbled around a few moments, and then found and lit a lamp, which threw a brilliant radiance through the cabin, which was divided by a semi-partition into two apartments, and furnished with a rude but neat simplicity.

At a motion from the strange girl, Charlie seated himself, while she vanished behind the partition for a few moments. When she returned she had removed the mask, and combed out her wealth of brown hair until in a great silken wave it fell a foot or more below her waist.

At sight of her face, Corduroy Charlie, used as he was to the etiquette of good society, could barely repress an exclamation. Such a fair vision of loveliness he had never seen.

If the contour and graceful, willowy pose of the form had attracted his admiration in the ball-room, the beauty of the face now did equally as much. The features were just round enough to be pretty, the mouth a trifle large but temptingly sweet, with pouting red lips, which needed no artificial coloring to make them natural; eyes seemingly of changeable shades to suit the moods, and a head which was more beautiful because of the placid forehead and the wealth of hair.

Such a vision was it that Corduroy Charlie saw, and gazed at in surprise and wonder—in admiration that for the moment knew no expression in words.

"You will excuse me!" the girl said, coming forward, "for neglecting you to attend to myself, but I really could scarcely breathe in that mask, and—"

"Certainly, you are excusable," Charlie replied, recovering his self-possession by an effort. "My wound is not painful—only slightly inconvenient. It was lucky I got no worse."

"Indeed it was; for McTurk is considered a crack shot," and kneeling by his side the maiden bared his arm, and proceeded with a careful and skillful hand to dress the wound, which was little more than a furrow plowed through the flesh, causing it to bleed profusely. "Why did the ruffian single you out for a quarrel?"

"That I do not know, miss. I had just arrived in this place, and he seemed desirous of rubbing against me. I trust he has got enough from his experiment."

"For a time, yes. But, as his wounds are not fatal, when he gets up you will need to watch him sharp, and look out for yourself, for Jem McTurk and his associates are generally feared as bold and desperate characters who hesitate at nothing in the way of crime to attain their own vicious aims. Attached to them there is a mystery, which our townspeople have not been able to solve."

"I fear not!" said Corduroy Charlie. "There! thanks; my arm feels much better. How much do you charge for your surgical services?"

"Oh! nothing at all. It gives me pleasure, always, when I am enabled to do a suffering fellow-creature good. Your name is Corduroy Charlie, sir?"

"Yes—that is, my *nom de plume*. And yours is—?"

"'Buster,' sir—at least that's what I am called, here in the mines. You can call me as others do."

"But isn't that rather an undignified appellation, miss, for a young lady—especially one of as charming presence as yourself?"

"Ha! ha! no. I have got fairly used to it and it seems like my own. You see, when I first came here, I let them all know that I had grit, a temper, and a will to defend myself from bad treatment, and insult—so they took revenge by naming me after their own liking."

"And, are you all alone here, in this rough mining country?"

"Oh! no; I have a relative—and besides him, a firm friend and protector in the person of an old scout. Ha! that is his step now"—and rising the beautiful eccentric hastened to unbar the door and admit a man to the room.

"Great pestiferous ham-bone thet macademized ther larnyx uv old andediluvian Joner!" this individual gasped, as he strode into the firelight, and his eyes rested first upon Buster and then on Corduroy Charlie. "Hev ye heerd ther news about Deadwood Dick? Old Moses thet perambulated thr'u' ther Scriptural bull-rushes! They *do* say thet Deadwood Dickey ar' ag'in abroad on ther road, at ther head o' a gang o' road-agents. Heerd it just a bit ago, down ther valley, an' gol durn my old Florence Night-in-a-gale's left hind buff, ef ther shock o' ther news warn't wuss'n ary old yearthquake as evyer cavorted thr'u' these consarned lattytudes an' longytoids!"

"Deadwood Dick?" echoed Buster, in astonishment. "Not the young gentleman whom you pointed out to me at the ball the other night?"

"Yas, ther very same identical Dickey, wi'out an atomostic deviation. I ked sw'ar et war not ther truth, only thet suthin' hes occurred thet makes me think ther boy's bin driven back ter ther old life."

"And what is that, friend?"

"Ther unfaithfulness of his wife, Leone. Great modest ham-bone thet delivered old Joner from jeopardy, arfter gittin' him inter a consarned diffikilty. Et makes my old bones gret tergether w'en I think o' et; Lordy, yes."

And Old Avalanche, for the strange-looking individual was none other than the famous Annihilator, bowed his head in his hands and wept. But, as a matter of habit, he never allowed grief long to hold sway over his spirit, and he soon straightened up, with the old grim look upon his face.

Shall we describe him? It seems to me useless, for he is no stranger to the thousands who regularly read this *Library*, in which he has repeatedly figured as a chief character. He is little changed; the lithe wiry form, buckskin-clad, is, if anything, 'hinner but more irony than before, and the furrowed, but good-expressed countenance is the same, unless the stubble beard and hair be a trifle more grizzled, and the eyes more sunken and haggard.

He straightens up now, wiping the moisture from his eyes with his shirt-sleeve, and then gazing first at one and then the other of his two companions.

"Who is the younker, Buster? Great intellectual ham-bone that giv old Joner the brain fever, but he do luk like a feller I once know'd up in Arizona. His name war Tom Fielding; but, alas! poor Tom's fingers war hooman magnets, war they; he couldn't pick up a bit o' iron 'cept et stuck to 'em, an' so one day he accidentally touched a ring in ther bits o' Vigilante Newton's horse, an' as Tom war emmigratin' ter another deestriet, an' as thar war no one handy at ther time to relieve him of his dilemma, very natterly Tom hed ter take ther hoss along. An' now he's up above, a-sittin' afore the great Regulator on ther charge o' kleptomatically appropriatin' Newton's boss."

"Indeed, Avalanche! Well, this isn't the Thomas of whom you speak, but a young gentleman who has just had a fight with McTurk, the bullwhacker. His name is Corduroy Charlie. Mr. Charlie, this gentleman is Old Avalanche, popularly known as the Great Annihilator. I trust you will be friends."

"Great ham-bone, yes!" Avalanche ejaculated, arising from his seat, and grasping Charlie's hand, cordially.

"On course we'll be famuss friends, an' no mistake!"

And while they were shaking hands, there came a heavy rap on the door, followed by three more in quick succession!

CHAPTER III.

LIEUTENANT CRESSLY—LILY—THE PROWLERS.

THE ruffian, McTurk, after the departure of Corduroy Charlie, was lifted by a number of his associates, who chanced to come up, and borne up the valley to a rude log cabin, where he lived, when he lived anywhere in particular. Here he was placed upon a rude bed, and his wounds attended to in the best possible manner, after which he was left alone, and his attendants returned to participate in the masquerade at Pretzel Pete's. For well they might desire to escape from the abusive bullwhacker's cabin, where the atmosphere seemed pregnant with the fumes of foul whisky and the ring of more biting curses. For it was to the latter two evils that McTurk resorted to find vent to his feelings and blunt the pain of his two wounds.

And a good hand was he at it, as an hour's unceasing torrent of oaths and guzzling from a demijohn proved. At the end of that time, however, his stock of wind was pretty well exhausted, and the tarant'ler gone, whereupon there prevailed more quiet in the cabin.

About this time a door was opened, and a man stepped into the apartment, taking the precaution to bar the door after him.

He then turned toward the cot where McTurk lay, and the lamp-light streaming full upon him, revealed a striking form, clad in purple velvet from head to foot—a man, whose face was masked and whose hair fell quite to the faultless masculine waist. The eyes that gleamed through the holes in the mask, however, were restless and fiery in their glances, and the fingers of the gloved hands worked convulsively as the stranger approached the bedside.

McTurk rolled over with a groan, as he heard the footsteps, and swore an introductory oath when he saw who was his visitor.

"The devil, lieutenant—is it you?" he growled, endeavoring to raise himself on his elbow, and partially succeeding. "I'm in a purty fix, ain't I?"

"I should say so!" the lieutenant assented. "Who's been going through you, Mac?"

"Thunderation! hain't ye heerd o' et, yit? Why, ye see, I got salted by a gang o' galbots, led by a feller they call Corduroy Charlie. Ten ter one, ye see, an' I hedn't ther smell o' a show. I dropped six o' 'em, howsumever, afore I caved in."

"Humph! what's your idea in telling me such a lie, McTurk, when I was present and witnessed the duel?"

"What you, Lieutenant Cressly? The dogs, you say!"

"I was present," was the calm assurance, "and saw the young bravo plug it to you solid!"

"Yes, he did, an' no mistake. Ther pet bullwhacker o' the Telefone line got basted, an' 'don' ye forgit et. But thar's a better day a-comin', when old Jem McTurk 'll ag'in buckle on his armor, an' sail in like a buffler bull. Whoop-ee!"

And the wounded "tough" gave a loud yell as he announced his premeditated action upon the enemy.

"You must take care of yourself!" Cressly said, glancing at his watch, "and get on your pegs as soon as possible, for you'll be needed directly. I'll keep an eye on this Corduroy Charlie; and when you get around, report, at once. Where is Monk Morgan, Grizzly George and the other boys?"

"Oh! I sent 'em off on a leetle private snap o' my own!" was the reply, with a chuckle.

"Take care you don't get so many of those leetle snaps o' yours, McTurk, that you neglect the boss's

matters, or you'll git salted, first ye know. The old she tiger shot Muller Miller thr'u' ther heart, yesterday, on a suspicion o' treachery."

"Curse her," McTurk gasped, a grayish pallor stealing over his bloated face—"she ar' a werry old fiendess, lieutenant. An' I bet—but nevyer mind. Got any whisky about ye?"

"Nary a drop. Be good ter yourself, and remember there is work waitin' fer you to do."

"Yes yes, an' bloody work, too!" the bullwhacker muttered, as the door closed behind the departing visitor. "It is but a few hours, comparatively, till the cussed sacrifice tak-s place. An' who'll be ther victim—aha! who? Why not the cuss who put me here—the young whelp who call himself, Corduroy Charlie? By all the furies, I'd love to see him the victim—yes! and he *shall* be the victim, I swear it. The warriors of the Sun shall not go hungry for their sacrifice, *this* time."

And a gleam horrible to behold was in the gaze of the ruffian, as he lay helpless upon the cot and glared around the room.

Corduroy Charlie's wagon-train, at the mean time, had moved on up the street, and turned off into the dark valley. When they were in a favorable spot, according to the judgment of Bad Medicine, a halt was made, and the weary mules were unhitched, hobbled and turned out to grass.

While Bad Medicine was engaged in this work, Clever Sam Yung, the Celestial, gathered fuel and built a camp-fire near the wagon, and proceeded to haul out provision and various culinary utensils from the rear end of the wagon.

He was an odd-looking genius, this Chinaman, with the unmistakable Chinese face and almond eyes, and form stumpy, fat and squatty. There was a sharp, cunning expression to his features, too, which was sufficient proof that he was not as dumb as he looked. At strong contrast was he with the brawny, big-bodied red-skin, with his uncut hair, and the grim expression of countenance—a face remarkable for its fatness, gleaming black eyes, large red nose—fiery red, too—and a huge mouth with lips out-generalizing those of an African.

After finishing caring for the mules, Bad Medicine drove some stakes around the camp and put up a siding of canvas, leaving the sky for a roofing.

This kept off the fierce wind which was blowing down the valley, in advance of the storm that threatened to burst and descend in torrents at any minute. The sky was inky black, and the thunder growled in hoarse jarring notes its warning for the pedestrian to seek hastily for shelter.

"Ugh! Pig-Tail man better much hurry, or rain put out him fire!" Bad Medicine advised, as he finished his work, and seated himself, pipe in hand, on a log before the crackling blaze.

"Reddee-skinee man no tellee Clever Sam muchee news!" the Celestial replied, hurrying about briskly. "'Melican manee muchee smartee; Chinese man know muchee as 'Melican, you bettee!'"

"Wagh! Pig-Tail know heap like prairie buzzard!" Bad Medicine replied, expressing his disgust in the puffs he took at his pipe. "He no good—um!"

"Reddee-skinee! reddee-skinee!" mocked Sam, dancing about, with a ludicrous grin on his flat, homely features.

"Chinese lickee reddee-skinee in fivee minnits. He! he! Reddee-skinee he no goodee. Muchee big shackasse—no goodee welly pidgin, he! he!"

Bad Medicine only grunted at this.

"Pig-Tail dog; no fight leetle baby," he observed, after a thoughtful silence. "He like Injun squaw, only good to cook meat, an' mind lodge. He no go hunt elk, or kill cinnamon bear."

And thus they had it, back and forth, while Clever Sam prepared coffee and roasted meat over the crackling camp fire, in a really creditable style.

When the meal was ready Bad Medicine put aside his pipe, and approaching the canvas-covered wagon, parted the curtains and peered in.

A lantern swung from the top of the frame-work, and diffused a dim light through the interior. Among the other contents of the wagon was a couch made of skins, and on this, half sitting, half reclining, was a young girl.

She was fair-haired and fair-faced, with brown eyes like to those of Corduroy Charlie, and auburn hair, which fell unconfined upon her shoulders. But the form, alas! Nature had not done its work well. The lower limbs were drawn and shrunken, and only the arms and trunk of the body were left perfect. A handsome pair of crutches lay near the crippled girl, and spoke of her only means of locomotion.

"Will de Lily come?" Bad Medicine asked, as he peered into the wagon. "We have supper of elk-meat and coffee to offer the pale face maiden."

With a weary sigh the girl nodded, and half crawled to the aperture, where Bad Medicine received her in his arms and carried her to the camp-fire, where he seated her upon a camp-stool which Clever Sam had been spry enough to procure. Then, when the firelight fell full upon her face, you could see what was hidden from view in the dim light of the wagon—the wildness of those dusky brown eyes, and the pained, piteous expression of the face, which would have been of marked beauty but for it.

An expression of peculiar tender sympathy mantled the features of the stolid red-skin, as he stood with folded arms, and gazed a moment down into the face of the Lily, as he had called her.

Even the flat, ludicrous countenance of Clever Sam was drawn into a sober cast, which made it all the more comical.

"Charlie! where is he? Where are we, Bad Medicine?" the cripple demanded, as her wild gaze took in the surroundings, and she made the discovery that Charlie was absent. "Where is my brother? Has he killed Dion Avery yet?"

"No; the brother of the fair lily is now in search of the white devil. He will soon be here, perhaps, wid white debbil's scalp."

"And where are we now?"

"In de valley of Castle Creek, where flowers grow. Will the Lily eat now, that she get strength till my white brudder come?"

"Yes-sy, 'Melican gallee muchee eatee now," suggested Clever Sam, making a dive for his carving-knife. "De Chinese man gotee muchee finee meal for 'Melican gal—elkee meatee an' coffee, he! he!"

Lily Madison smiled faintly as she received the plate of fragrant meat and cup of coffee from the Celestial, and ate a few mouthfuls.

"Is this what they call Quartz City, Sam?" she asked, looking up from a thoughtful survey of the fire before. "Is this the end of our journey?"

"Yes-sy, mume, dis Quartzee Cittee—muchee finee place. Pidgin place for Chinese man; git mennee 'Melican man's shirtee to washee!"

"Ugh! Pig-Tail talk fast an' much like Injun papoose—no wisdom in his words. He made to wash Injun's shirt an' cook—no much good."

"Reddee-skinee no goodee for centee!" replied Sam, with a grim wink. "Chinese man he lickee reddee-skinee so quicke like lightning; den stealee shirtee an' runnee muchee fast away likee debbil. He! he!"

"Hell, boys! Darn my eyes if they ain't got a curiosity in ther jest as Jim McTurk hinted. Cum up an' take a peep!"

These words came rolling distinctly down into the camp, and the astonished trio glanced quickly around in surprise, to behold the head and shoulders of four brawny men visible above the canvas siding which Bad Medicine had put up around the camp. Evil and hairy were the faces, too, the features contorted by long dissipation, and the eyes gleaming and bloodshot.

It was the ruffian, Monk Morgan, who had spoken, and the gaze of all four was leveled directly upon the poor crippled girl, who shrunk away with a low cry of terror, which caused a hoarse laugh to escape

the lips of Morgan as he leaned further over the canvas.

"Don't be afeard, gal!" he said, in a low, mocking tone. "We ain't a-goin' ter hurt ye, nary a time. See'd a light down heer, an' as we constitute a kind o' Peace-Patrol to the town, we thort we'd better look inter matters."

"Ugh! what pale-faces want?" Bad Medicine demanded, as he reached for his rifle, which stood against the wagon. "De Lily much 'fraid ob strangers—you go on from de camp."

"Hello! what d'ye say, Injun? We go away, beca'se you say so? Phew! d'ye ever heer ther ekal, boys? S'posin' we give him a h'ist ter glory, jest fer fun?"

"Ugh! pale-faces better keep away!" Bad Medicine said, resolutely raising and cocking his rifle. "Dey mean no good to the White Lily, an' better go mind deir business, or Bad Medicine will shoot!"

"He! he! he! Reddee-skinnee shootee!" assented Clever Sam, with a tickled smile. "He badee 'Melican man; gitt-e muchee on his muscle!"

"Wal, ye kin put down yer shutin' instrument, red-skin!" Monk Morgan said, with a stare hard at poor Lily. "We'll make ourselves skeerce, ef we're sech horrid objects as frighten the gal, yander. We don't want ter be mistook fer rough customers, us Peace Commissioners. oh! no. Adieu, red-skin; adieu, pig-tail! Come round ter Pretzel Pete's an' we'll git ye staven drunk, fer puttin' in a good word fer us. *Au rero r*, young leddy—pleasant dreams ter ye! Hol! hol! hol! Come along, boys!"

And off tramped the roughs, with shouts of laughter, which made the vale ring—much to the relief of both Lily Madison and Bad Medicine, who could but interpret danger from their coming.

Poor Lily!

She little knew or guessed what those same ruffians were to be to her.

CHAPTER IV.

IN THE "BIG SCHOONER"—CLEVER SAM GOES OUT WITH MORGAN.

"BUSTER" looked at Old Avalanche in alarm and dismay, as she heard the raps.

"It is he!" she gasped, glancing nervously around, "and he must not see me to-night. Where can I hide?"

"Great ham-bone! w'at's ther yearthly use o' git-tin' skeered. Git behind ther screen—no! I won't admit 'im; that's ther way ter fix 'im."

The beautiful girl arose quickly and glided behind the partition, while the veteran scout approached the door.

To Charlie all this was an enigma, and he secretly wondered who it was that "Buster" was so afraid of.

The raps were now repeated with greater force, until the old door trembled under them.

"Hello! gr'at ham-bone that sotygraffed ther larynx of old Joner! who's out thar, an' what d'ye want this stormy night?"—for the patter of rain upon the roof bespoke the fact that the storm was beginning to descend.

"'Tis I, Lieutenant Cressly," was the gruff reply. "Come! you cursed old wolf, let me in out o' the rain, before I kill you!"

"Ken't come in hyar—great explorative Moses who s'arched out ther great natteral secrets o' ther bullrushes, no! This ar' my cabin, ar' this same pile o' logs, an' you chalk et fine. An' as fer yer hullsale slaughterin' o' this great equinoxyl gust o' skurgin' disease, ye mought as well attempt ter argy ter an Injun thet tarant'ler ar' not fit fer a hoss ter drink. Ken't cum in ter-night, Mr. Cressly, fer ye see as how I am werry sleepy, an' don't wanter be distarbed."

"Curses on you!" was the fierce response. "D've s'pose I'm goin' ter stand out here in the soakin'

wet all night, waitin' your motion? Come! come! open the door, I say!"

"Great a'riferous ham-bone! I'm orful sorry, I'utenant, but I reely ken't accommodate ye. Cum some other time when Buster's home."

"She is in there now."

"Bet ye a bunt from ther head-gear o' my old goat, Flor'nce Night-in-a-gale, durned ef I won't; or a ten-gallon bottle o' 160 fire-test tarant'ler, by Jerusalem!"

"Where is she, then, curse ye?"

"Waal now, thet's askin' me a purty p'inted question, considerin' ther fac' thet my scope o' vision ain't werry ex'tended. 'Spect ye better look fer her over at Pretzel Pete's."

There was a curse from the outside again; a moment's pause, during which the rain poured down the heavier, and then the lieutenant was heard tramping off, swearing like a trooper.

"Thar!" Old Avalanche said, turning back toward the fire, with a chuckle. "One more galoot sent off ther trail. Ye kin cum out, Buster!"

The girl accepted the invitation, but when she appeared it was in a short Spanish suit of velvet, liberally slashed with gold trimmings, the skirt reaching just high enough to expose a pretty pair of slippers and ankles to view.

There was a pretty flush upon her cheeks as she caught the admiring expression in Corduroy Charlie's eye. Could Charlie but have noticed it, there was a reciprocating light in her eyes, which sparkled like diamonds.

"Aha! heer comes our beauty!" Avalanche exclaimed, with a grunt of approbation. "Purtiest gal that eveyer buckled a button, boyee, an' hayr's w'at 'll sw'ar ter et."

"To which let me add my opinion that you are pretty nearly right!" put in Charlie, with a pleasant laugh. "But you must now excuse me, for I must necessarily be going."

"Going! whar, fer lordy's sake?"

"To my wagon-train, which I sent to camp somewhere in this valley. I have there a sister and a pair of trusty servants, who have accompanied me into this country and I must look after them."

"Great ham-bone, yes; but w'at d'ye calkylate ye kin do in thes rain an' darkness? Wait till old Sun shows his face, an' then ye'll hev twice ther prospect o' findin' 'em, aided as ye'll be by thes yere great Injun eppydemic o' destruction."

And so it was that Corduroy was induced to wait at the cabin, which was in no way or manner a disagreeable duty since Buster was there to make things radiant with her merry presence; and Old Avalanche, too, added to the pleasantness as only he in his eccentric way could do.

Shortly after the departure of Monk Morgan and his "peace commissioners," the rain began to descend, and poor Lily Madison signified her readiness to be lifted back into the wagon, whose covering was waterproof, and had been her shelter for many a long day's ride through the wild West.

So Bad Medicine accordingly lifted her back into the vehicle, and followed her, himself, for the large drops were pattering down freely. Clever Sam still sat by the camp-fire, devouring what was left of the evening's repast, voraciously.

"Ugh! Pig-Tail man get good wet if stay outside!" the red-skin observed, as he sat with his long buckskin-clad legs dangling out of the front end of the wagon. "Do him *heep* good."

"Chinee man no 'fraidee muchee water!" Sam replied, finishing the last scrap with a sigh, which could scarcely be interpreted as one of relief.

"'Melican man muchee fraidee water; muchee dirttee; no goodee. Chinee span cleanee; gittee muchee nice 'Melican girl for wifee."

"Wagh! Pig-Tail heap big lie! No white maiden notice man with frog eyes. Where goin'?" for the Celestial was evidently making preparations to leave the camp.

"Sh!" Clover Sam replied, with a crafty smile upon his flat visage, and a warning nod toward the wagon. "Chinee man muchee dry—go gittee whiskey—muchee finee whiskey. Reddee-skianee keepee still. Chinee git whiskey of 'Melican man, an' bringee to reddee-skinnee."

And then he made a dive and disappeared in the darkness. If Bad Medicine had any thought of not allowing the Celestial to leave camp, he made no attempt to stop him; but a strange, eager gleam shot into his eyes, and his lips parted and shut almost with a smack.

"What is it, Bad Medicine?" Lily Madison asked, from her couch of furs. "Didn't you speak?"

"No! Injun no say anyting!" was the grim response. "He listen an' hear de tears fall from sky. He no like rain; like to see him fair an' de sun shine. Injun feel *white* when sun shine; feel debbil w'en de sky gloomy."

"Why don't Charlie come, chief?"

"Bad Medicine don' know. Pale-face youth much bravo; he lick painter by dozen—take care of himself. He come back all right, when sun shine in valley."

"Oh! I hope so!" was the sad reply. "Oh! Lord how long! how long! before my vengeance?"

In the mean time, the shrewd and scheming Clever Sam was skurrying back onto the main street of the town.

He waddled along, cutting rather a queer figure, and attracting general attention, for as yet none of his almond-eyed brethren had graced the streets or society of Quartz City.

But he took no notice of the jeering remarks of the crowds, but kept on until he came to Pretzel Pete's establishment, which he entered and ranged himself along the bar, where there were also a crowd of roughs and miners, absorbing the moisture that big Pete served out at two bits a finger.

"Hello! vat you say?" Pretzel Pete exclaimed, as he discovered the Celestial; "vat is dish you haff here? Shimminy gracious unt my vife Katrina! ish dot a monkey, or ish et a shackass mit his tail on his het?"

"Haw! haw! don' ye kno', Pete? Thet's a Chinaman! Ther very furst arrival in the tropical latitude o' Quartz City. A real live almond-eyed galoot!" cried one of the roughs. "I say, Pig-Tail, w'at's yer lay-out?"

"Chinee man no havee layee-out! 'Melican man muchee mistakee. He no knowee Chinee man. Chinee man washee-washee 'Melican man's shirtee; 'Melican man payee Chinee man five bitsee. He! he! he!"

"Ho! ho! So *thet's* yer lay-out, hey? A washee-washee right from the old school, eh? Waal, waal! What d'ye think o' him, Pretzel Peter the Great?"

"Shimminy gracious unt my vife Katrina? Ish dot der kind off a veller vat you call a Chinaman? *Wie gahls*, China; how you vas? Vat'll you haff at your own exbense?"

"Nixy! Chinee man no drinkee whiskey. Wantee man callee Monkee Morgan—wantee see Monkee Morgan welly much!"

"Hoo-o-ray!" yelled the rough, with a bellow of laughter, as he danced up and down.

"Hip! yip! hooray! *Monkey* Morgan! haw! haw! haw! thet's too rich ter digest on an empty stomach. Set out thet long black-necked bottle o' p'izen, Pretzel Peter the Great—set her out I say, an' charger ther contents ter Andy Adair, ther man wi' ther coal-black hair, who kin make a preecher sware he's neither fat ner spare. Hoo! hoo! hoo! kerwhoop! *Monkey* Morgan! haw! haw! thet beats last yeer's almanack jokes all ter blazes. Fer instance, jest—

"*Monkey* Morgan played the organ,
Hes father war a bum,
His sister—"

"Hello!" roared a stentorian voice, at this juncture, the sound of which caused Mr. Andy Adair to cease his rude vocal effort—"who's ther galoot as

durst take ther name o' Monk Morgan in vain? Show me ther cuss w'ile I chaw off his ear!"

"Whoa-a-r up, Morgan!" Andy said, with a grin. "We war jest hevin' a larf at ther Celestial, heer, who war inquirin' fer Monkey Morgan—haw! haw! haw!"

"Ther devil! The Chinaman here!" Morgan cried, fastening his gaze upon the Celestial, whose time was equally divided between the copious lunch on the bar and a watch on the door.

The temptation to remain near the lunch seemed greater than to escape from the rough companionship into which he had fallen.

"Hello! I say, ye pig-tailed rascal!" Morgan repeated advancing closer, with one hand upon the handle of a revolver. "Why don't yer look up an' salute ther king cock o' ther roost, as ther rest o' ther b'yees do?"

"Nixy! nixy!" Clever Sam replied, with a shake of his head, and a gorgeous grin. "Chinee man no salute 'Melican man—salutee lunchee—*muchee* good!"

"Shimminy gracious, unt my wife, Katrina!" exclaimed Pretzel Pete, in utter astonishment, as he saw his pretzels and sweitzer-case and sauer-kraut fast fading from view. "Dot veller haff abbetite so large ash several hogs."

"So he has, Pretzel Peter, but he is nowhere alongside of you, with your big circumference."

"'Melican man havee muchee big body—muchee bigger Chinee man!" allowed Sam, casting his eyes at the blonde-haired German. "Chinee man no eatee so much as 'Melican man."

"Waal, let's drop the subject, an' test our tankage—my treat!" proposed Andy Adair. "Pretzel Peter, where's thet bottle I ordered?"

"Yes; shimminy gracious vat hash pecome off it?" the German exclaimed, staring round in dismay. "I shoost sets dot pottle on der counter, so sure's my name's Peter Von Schemmerhorn, ont now him gone—sdo! T'iefs! t'iefs!"

"Search the Chinee! I'll bet he's got et stowed away!" cried Monk Morgan.

And accordingly a rush was made at Clever Sam, with the result of producing the missing bottle from under the semi-gown which he wore.

"Ther! cuss ye!" Morgan exclaimed—"w'at ye got ter say fer yerself fer stealin' Pretzel Pete's tarant'ler? What d'ye steal the p'izen fer?"

"Chinee man no stealee p'izen!" Sam chattered back, with his ludicrous face drawn down to its soberest possible expression. "Chinee man *borrow* p'izen to killee rats wi' fromee 'Melican. He no stealee—no stealee, nottee muchee!"

"Waal, all right. Let ther galoot off, this time, boys," Monk Morgan said, with a coarse laugh.

"*Comee alongee*, ye durned almond-eyed cuss, fer I've got a leetle bizness with ye. Drink all round at my expanse till I rejoin ye, pilgrims. Come, Celestial; I want to talk turkey to you!"

"Shimminy gracious, unt my wife, Katrina!" breathed Pete, as the two men took their departure. "Ish dot der kind off a veller vat you call a Chinaman?"

"Yes, Pretzel Peter," responded Mr. Andy Adair, with a swagger; "thet's a real live Celestial, an' I hev heerd et remarked thet them same galoots greatly resembled ther Germans."

"Vat! vat you say? Dose flat-faced, shackass cuss look like der Shermans? Dunder an' plitzen!"

And Pretzel Pete looked wrathfully into the mirror that graced his bare shelf, to satisfy himself that his round, shiny face bore no resemblance to the ludicrous visage of Clever Sam.

"I know'd ash how et vas von shoke, shendlemen, unt you didn't fool me so badder ash you t'ought. But shoost valt avile, ondil dot Chinaman pokes his head in dish place ag'in; den I giff him somedinks he don't vant!"

At this juncture the brawny scout, Silver Beard, came hurriedly out of the dance-hall, and went out into the street.

CHAPTER V.

A DISCOVERY OF TREACHERY—THE WARNING.

As soon as day was hardly yet breaking upon the horizon, Corduroy Charlie announced that he must take his departure.

"I hope, however, to have the pleasure of meeting you again, Miss —," he said, addressing the gloriously beautiful girl. "Your name I do not really think becoming for so pretty a young lady, and I hesitate to address you by it."

"Then should you meet me again, you may call me Lena Vernon!" was the reply, after which they shook hands, and Charlie and Avalanche set forth into the early gloom of the morning. The Boy Bravo's arm had by this time ceased to be painful, and he was thankful that he had received no worse injuries at the hands of the rough and villainously-inclined McTurk.

After learning which way Corduroy had sent his wagon, Avalanche shaped his course as near as he could in the direction in which he calculated they might have camped, and they set out.

When the darkness had sufficiently rolled away, so that an unobstructed view of the valley could be had, both Avalanche and Corduroy Charlie paused on a little eminence and glanced searchingly around them.

"Ah! I see them!" Charlie exclaimed, pointing off to the southeast; "yonder where there are but few shanties. See! a wagon surrounded by a siding of canvas. That's the rig in which I've traveled into every mining strike in the Black Hills country."

"Perzactly: an' why've ye at last fetched up hyar, b yee?" the Annihilator asked, as they resumed their tramping. "Reckon ye're more fitted fer a down-east bandbox!"

"Ha! ha! that's where you mistake me. I've roughed it a good deal during my couple of years' experience in this country, and seen about as many tough sights and customers as any one of my age. You ask me why I came here to Quartz City. I cannot tell you why now. It is on account of a crippled sister whom I have down yonder at the wagon. When you see her, and her condition, you may guess that only some grievous wrong could induce me to fetch her here. It looks quiet about the camp yonder; maybe they're all asleep yet."

"Great aristocratic ham-bone! et kinder lukes thet way, as ef she war desarted."

Without further comment the two men hurried on, and soon Charlie pulled aside the canvas and peered into the front end of the wagon.

"My God! gone!" he gasped, reeling back as if he had been dealt a blow. "She is not in there!"

"Thunder! ye don't tell us? Great Moses! thet war ther first mortal evyer ter populate ther historic bull-rushes. Sumthin' hes worked in ther wrong groove, as old Sally Jenks used ter say when ther Injun heathen got inter his corn-crib. So ther gal's gone, is she?"

"Yes, gone! and also my servants!" Charlie groaned, staring about for an explanation to the matter. "They have turned traitor and spirited her off—Heaven knows where!"

"W'at war ther pedigree an' caliber o' yer pards! Mebbe we kin trace 'em up an' recover the gal."

"One was a Chinaman, whom I have retained as a servant for over a year. I called him Clever Sam. The other was a red-skin chief called Bad Medicine, whom I could have sworn by, any time—which makes the mystery greater now!"

"A Chinaman an' a red nigger! Great molestive ham bone, w'at war a hell gate ter old Joner's larynx! an' ye left yer sister in ther purtection o' sech a blarsted crew?"

"Yes, as I have repeatedly done so in the past. I would have trusted either of them to any amount."

"Waal, thet shows thet ye ain't a pilgrim in these boreal lattytudes an' longytoads. Trust an Injun or a Celestial? Great ham-bone; I'd as soon trust my old goat, Florence Night-in-a-gale in the presiden-

tyal cheer. Once she got thar, she'd show 'em plenty o' sarcus."

"Well, I cannot stand here talking when my poor sister may be needing me to defend her. I must hunt her up."

"Perzactly, as old Samantha Pruggles sed ter Deacon Jones when he squeezed her hand an' proposed they connect fer life. But how're ye goin' ter work w'en ye ain't got no sign?"

"I don't know, but I must make a move somehow. Hark!"

A groan just then wafted to their hearing—a sort of grunt and groan combined, as if some person were just wakening from a deep sleep.

"What was that?" Charlie demanded, with a start.

"I shed reckon et war a kind o' a hooman sound!" Avalanche replied, with a grim expression in the corners of his mouth. "Leastways, it cum from thet clump o' bushes over yender, an' I allow we'd better investigate."

Accordingly they hurried over to the spot, and in a moment had pulled out of the bushes the brawny figure of Bad Medicine, the chief.

"Drunk as ary old beast!" Avalanche exclaimed. "See; here's his bottle, empty of every drop o' moisture."

"He must have had more than the contents of that one bottle to stupefy him, for his capacity for whisky is marked for at least a gallon!" Charlie replied with a smile, as he gazed at the red-skin, who appeared in a state of beastly intoxication.

"Mebbe he's bin drugged," Avalanche suggested. "In that case, I've got a leetle raccoon's ile hayr, w'at'll fetch him ter limericks."

He produced a small vial from his pocket, and forcing open the savage's mouth, poured a few drops down his throat.

The effect was startling.

The eyes suddenly began to unclose, and Bad Medicine sprung to his feet with an ear-splitting yell which rung out and echoed on the clear morning air.

"Ugh! fire! fire!" he cried, clutching his head between his hands and dancing frantically around.

"Great ham-bone, no, red-skin!" the Annihilator snorted, as he himself stood half-doubled up with convulsive laughter. "You've got the 'James' ther wu'st sort. Don't ye see them snakes in yer boots? Haw! haw! haw! talk about yer devastatin' eppydemics, will ye?—about yer rip-roarin' decoctations o' supervised exstinction, will ye? I'll bet ther pelt o' my old Florence Cordeliar thet ye ken't find a purtier subject this side o' purgatory."

"What's the matter with him?" Corduroy asked, as the chief continued to roar and bellow around at a fearful rate.

"Nuthin' only a leetle raccoon's ile ter settle his brain!" Avalanche answered. "He'll be better soon—thar, didn't I tell ye so?" as the red-skin suddenly ceased his gyrations, to stare around in a bewildered manner. "Why, boyee, I've known thet same raccoon's ile ter cure a man o' the 'jams' in quicker time then my old mare Prudence ked shock a man wi' ther electricity o' her hind feet. Fac', by gracious!"

"Ugh! fire burn berry much here!" Bad Medicine grunted, rubbing his cranium.

"Oh! thet war but a shuger-lump ter w'at ye'll git w'en old Gabr'el blows his fish-horn. Injun!"

"Bad Medicine!" Corduroy Charlie said, sternly, "how is it that I come back to camp and find my sister and Clever Sam gone, and you dead drunk?—how can you explain the matter?"

The chief started violently, and gave a glance toward the deserted wagon.

"De White Lily gone?" he articulated, huskily, a strange fire shooting into his eyes. "Bad Medicine drunk?"

"Just so. When I returned, a few moments ago, I found the camp deserted, and discovered you lying

in these bushes, dead drunk. Now I want an explanation, or down goes your shanty instanter."

"Ugh! Bad Medicine berry much fool!" was the answer. "He let Pig-Tail man go out of camp. He come back and gib Bad Medicine bottle of whisky. Bad Medicine drink him, an' dat's all he know."

"Ha! then it was the rascally Chinaman, eh, who has done this deviltry in my camp?"

"Yes. Pig-Tail man heap no good. He treacherous like de painter; he steal like de debbil—ugh! bad man!"

"Great demonstrative ham-bone thet thunderbolted old Joner's larnyx! Thet's jest ther way wi' one o' them almond eyed galoots!" broke in the Annihilator. "Nevyer know'd one yet as wouldn't sell 'em fer tooth-picks. An' for drinkin' whisky, ye ken't beat 'em. But come; if we're goin' ter take ther war-path, et's time we war startin'. W'at d'ye propose ter do, boyee?"

"There seems no alternative but to make quiet inquiries for Clever Sam, and after we find him, force him to tell what has become of my sister," Corduroy Charlie replied, thoughtfully. "He it evidently was who had an agency in the abduction, and until we find him we have little hope of discovering Lily."

"Bad Medicine take war-path!" said the chief, savagely. "No come back till he git White Lily an' Pig-Tail's scalp. Ugh!"

"Bully fer you, red-skin; but mind, ef you play any shenanigan on us, I'll annihilate ye like I hev thousands o' yer tribe—teetotally become yer last sickness."

Without deigning to notice the old scout's threat, Bad Medicine strode away to the wagon for his rifle, and then across the vale toward the main streets of the "city," with long, swinging strides that counted rapidly.

"He is in a gloomy mood, and woe be to Clever Sam if he gets in the red-skin's way!" Corduroy said. "And as there is nothing here to detain us, except an old wagon and a few traps, I propose that we branch out and work till we find a trail."

They accordingly separated, Avalanche first giving the young Bravo some instructions in regard to certain dens of iniquity and vice in the town which were dangerous to visit.

The Annihilator went back in the direction of Lena Vernon's, while Charlie kept on toward the main part of the town, where Bad Medicine had gone.

In nearing one of the many scattered cabins, he heard a vile string of oaths, and glancing in through a window as he passed, he beheld Jim McTurk sitting up in bed, attempting to use his arms, which was a painful operation, owing to the wounds, in either side, elbow high.

"Ha! so 'tis in here that my enemy nurses his wrath, eh?" the young Bravo muttered as he kept on. "Well, I don't believe he has anything to do with the abduction of Lily, or I'd go in there and choke the breath out of him. Can it be that the enemies mentioned in the anonymous note I received a few days ago, have begun their deadly campaign against me?"

As if impressed with the idea, he paused in his walk, and drew a crumpled note from his pocket. With a perplexed knitting of the brows, he perused it several times over, without seeming to derive any satisfaction from it. It ran as follows:

"CUSTER CITY.

"MR. CORDUROY CHARLIE:—

"As a friend to your interests, let me advise you not to visit the mining strike, in or near the National Park section of the hills, known as Quartz City. For there are enemies there who know of your coming—bitter enemies whom you know not, but who have been your enemies since your birth. Your parentage has ever been a matter of doubt to you; these foes know much concerning it, and will attempt to smite you, out of revenge's sake. Keep clear of Quartz City lest you learn that which would be of no

relish to you—lest you are struck by enemies when least expected, and of whom you never dreamed. Your mission in this country is one of no Christian character. Let your object be consummated by One who has a higher cause than you.

"AN UNKNOWN FRIEND."

"No! no! I will let out the object to no other hands than mine!" Corduroy Charlie gritted fiercely, as he kept on toward the town.

CHAPTER VI.

THE WARDVILLES—DEADWOOD DICK TELLS THE STORY OF LEONE'S FALL.

AN incoming stage brought with it to Quartz City an Ohioan and his wife, whose names were Wardville.

The man was a large, well-proportioned person, of forty-five years, with a kindly expression of face and eyes, showing him to be of mild temper and exceeding honest, good-nature. He wore his beard cropped rather short; was dressed in plain but substantial clothing, and wore a cable-chain across his vest of solid gold.

His wife was a fitting companion for the pleasant-appearing Ohioan—a quiet little matronly woman, with a placid face and plump form, and was dressed with the same taste yet plainness of raiment which characterized the husband. She too, however, wore expensive jewelry.

The stage deposited the Wardvilles in front of Pretzel Pete's establishment, along with a pair of large Saratogas, and then rattled away down the street, leaving the Ohioan and his wife staring at the uninviting front of the "Big Schooner," which was pasted over with such flaring labels and signs as—"Lager Bier, four bits;" "Sweitzer Kase unt Pretzels;" "160 fire-test Tarant'ler, fifty cents a pint."

"Humph!" the Ohioan ejaculated, as he viewed things, generally. "It appears to me, Madge, that Quartz City can't boast of superior accommodations in the way of hotels, if this is the best. It's nothing more or less than a lager beer saloon."

"True, Judson; but perhaps we cannot find better quarters," replied Mrs. Wardville. "Look! there comes the proprietor, now," and she pointed to Pretzel Pete, who, on seeing the disembarked strangers before his door, had hastened out to investigate.

"Good-mornings—how you vas?" he saluted, as he waddled down the steps.

"We were just looking for the best hotel which our stage-driver assured us existed somewhere in this vicinity!" Wardville replied, shaking hands with the good-natured German. "Maybe you can tell us where it is, sir."

"Shimminy gracious, yes. Dot vas my blace ter a dot. Der 'Big Schooner' ish der leading hodel mit der city. Walk right in, for I haff swi' rooms upstairs vot tickle you right mit shoy. Dis vay, please!" and the proprietor of the Big Schooner opened a side door which admitted them into a hallway.

On ascending a stairs they soon found themselves domiciled in a suit of two rooms, directly over the saloon part of the building, which were tastefully furnished for being almost at the extreme limits of civilization, with warm-tinted wool carpets, sofa furniture and a luxurious bed in the smaller room, together with pictures on the walls, and other ornaments of an adorning nature.

"Eh? vat you say?" Pretzel Pete ejaculated, as the Wardvilles gave a sigh of relief. "How vas dis for vatermellon, eh? Don't got fooled; vas?"

"The rooms are satisfactory," said Judson Wardville, with a bow, "and as long as we sojourn in Quartz City we will keep them. You may now send us up a good dinner, if you please."

Pretzel Peter bowed graciously, and descended the stairs, full of glory over his success in capturing a pair of guests of the upper ten.

As for the Wardvilles, they were only too glad to find themselves in such comfortable quarters, after their rough tour through the Hills.

Their trunks were soon brought up, and after them came a savory meal of roast game, rye bread and coffee, with a small bottle of Rhine wine, which however, was left untouched.

"Well, we are here, and have taken our first meal in Quartz City, wife," Mr. Wardville said, tipping back in his seat, and lighting a cigar, at the close of the repast. "The next question is—what are we here for?"

"That question needs no answer, b-tween us, Judson," Mrs. Wardville replied. "You know what faint clew brought us here, and how we have hoped and prayed for a glad realization."

"Yes! yes! but somehow, I have put rather an indifferent sort of confidence in the matter, all along. It would not surprise me if our hopes should be realized—it would not surprise me to find them defeated."

"You speak strangely, Judson!"

"Do I? Well, then, it is because I have long since deadened my faith in the matter. As long as we have been pursuing the faint hope, unsuccessfully, I have constantly been losing interest in the chase. I marvel that my hair and beard have not turned white, ere this."

"True, you have undergone much, dear husband, as well as myself, but I am pressed with the belief that our trusting faith in God, at all times, has in a measure preserved us."

"Well—well, Madge, I cannot say as to that; but certainly pure faith in the All-wise Creator works no man evil, in the great hereafter. Leaving you here awhile, I think I will take a stroll about the place."

"Will you make inquiries?"

"No, not at present. We had best wait, and bide our time. If we have come on a wild-goose-chase, it does not appear worth while to apprise these denizens of the fact. If, on the contrary, it proves that we have come here to any purpose, there is time enough to work. Things done in haste are not, as a rule, done well."

"What a logician you are, to be sure, Judson," Mrs. Wardville said, laughingly.

"Logic is simply common sense, dear. Now, good-by, for maybe an hour, or so," and kissing the woman who had ever been a faithful and loving wife to him, Wardville descended to the bar-room of the "Big Schooner," where the usual gang of rough and illiterate patrons were taking their morning "nip o' dew." There were miners, and stage-drivers, gamblers and desperadoes all mixed together, with now and then a genteel speculator, or maybe now and then a military officer or private.

After reviewing the crowd in the bar-room with a critical eye, Judson Wardville passed into the dance-hall, only to remain a few moments, for the females who were lounging on the side seats, smoking and drinking, or taking part in the mazy waltz, were not such as he could either respect or admire.

That same afternoon, Old Avalanche was sitting upon a bowlder in the dark recesses of the Southern canyon, which, like a deep, narrow fissure, ran through the mountains, its course declining, and bottom being hundreds of feet below the hoary mountain-peaks which rose and cast a solemn shadow o'er its course.

Before the scout the clear bright waters of Castle Creek purled and sprayed through a rocky channel, and made strangely weird music echo along the gigantic walls that arose on every side.

Far above, the peaks were crowned with spectral pines, and the wind wafted down the scent of them and mingled it with the fragrance of the flowers on a wild syringa bush which grew close at hand.

Close at the Annihilator's side crouched that specimen of the *genus capri*, which was the old man's pride—the vicious, ugly-looking goat, Florence Nightingale, which had been his boon companion on many a wilderness journey, and during many a campaign against the hostile red-skins.

The goat was engaged at browsing away at a hem-

lock limb, while the old scout sat with his chin resting upon his two hands, gazing thoughtfully up and down the canyon, as the day drew toward a close.

"Reckon thet sister o' Corduroy Charlie's ar' a goner!" he soliloquized, as he took a bite from a plug of twist.

"I've looked all over, e'ena'most, ter find her, but no crippled gal ner Chineese galoot kin I git news uv. Thet's one deefikilty w'at's cloggin' ther path o' this yere devastatin' eppydemic o' ther peraries. Hayr in thes place they call me the 'mountain king,' an' great ham-bone w'at war a perigrinashun p'int ter old Joner! ef I ain't got my lanes fuller o' bizness than a full-blowed wassup, may this great disease o' ther boreal lattitudes an' knpytoads be everlastin'ly extirpated. Thar's Corduroy Charlie—a nice sort o' a galoot—I must help him out o' his rigs; then thar's thet matter about old Ugly Ann, an' her Warriors o' ther Sun God—thet citizens want me ter lay fer ther stronghold. Then cums thet affair about Deadwood Dick an' his wife—thet report w'ich don't go down me easy. Great shadder o' old Moses who peregrinated thr'u' ther Biblikal bull-rushes! I'd ruther swaller a dose o' gin an' cotton, then b'lieve thet leetle red-haired Leone Harris hed gone ter ther dogs!"

"Alas! yes! but 'tis only too true!"

The latter words were not spoken by the scout, but by another.

Another, who, upon a powerful and glossy black horse, had ridden within a few feet of the Annihilator without his knowledge. And as the latter wheeled around he uttered an exclamation at sight of the black-clad, black masked figure which sat so erect in the saddle.

"Deadwood Dick!" he gasped, his old features contorting in'o an expression of recognition. "Can et be possyble et aire you?"

"Quite possible, old man!" was the reply, in the road-agent and regulator's familiar voice. "You behold Deadwood Dick again, as you first met him."

"On ther road b'ye?"

"Yes, on the road." And as he spoke, the young man slipped from his saddle and came nearer, the striking beauty of his perfect form at strong contrast with the grim mask that covered the upper portion of his face. "You were just speaking of Leone, Avalanche—the who has been the alternate blessing and curse of my life."

"Yes, I war speakin' o' her, boyee, fer sence I heerd o' yer goin' back outter ther road, an' o' her desartion, I've been in a quandersum deefikilty," the old man replied in a husky tone.

"Et sorter made me sick, ther new, ye see, fer I allus loved the gal's ef she war my own darter."

"Of course you did; but your love was but a small insignificant item compared with the idolatrous passion I had for her. Love was a weak word. I more than loved—I worshiped her. You know it; and that since our reunion after that affair of jealousy, which was settled up at Eureka, I have been a devoted husband to her—she was my idol."

"Great ham-bone! yes, boyee; I never see'd but w'at ye war gude ter her, an' I ken't ascribe any motive for her leavin' ye."

"Nor can I; but she is gone—hopelessly, and I shall never seek to restore her to my bosom!" Deadwood Dick said, bitterly.

"Are you sure, Dick?" the veteran scout asked, catching at the least possible hope, as the drowning man would catch at a fragment of bark on the floating tide. "Ain't there sum mistake?—sum unfounded suspicion?"

"None!" Deadwood Dick replied, fiercely, stopping his impatient pacing—"none, Avalanche. Listen to me, and then if you can put in even a word f'r her I will hear your defense or opinion."

"I was up in Whoop-Up a few weeks ago, playing regulator. After the despersion of my band, Leone went over to Hayward City to stay, as I supposed, with my sister, Mrs. McKenzie. When I went to Hayward I didn't find Leone at Anita's, but in a cab-

in, lying on the floor—*dead drunk!* She had not been near McKenzie's, but from all reports had been with a noted gambler, called Handsome Hal. I wanted proof; I left the cabin to keep watch; I saw the gambler come—saw enough to drive many a stronger man than me insane with fury; I forbore shooting them then and there, but went out into the mountains to cool off. There I met some men whom I knew to be trusty, and on the impulse of a moment I reorganized my road-agent band, and Deadwood Dick's flag was again unfurled in the face of the world. When I returned to Hayward, Leone and her evil genius were gone. I am now hunting for her."

"What will you do, Dickey, boyee?"

"I'll find her!" said Deadwood Dick, with that wild, terrible laugh of his: "I'll find her, and remind her of the innocent babe she bore me, now dead, and then put bullets through her faithless heart till she is dead."

Then, as he ceased speaking, the wronged man turned, vaulted into the saddle, and dashed swiftly away up the canyon.

CHAPTER VII.

PEACE-COMMISSIONERS AND ROAD-AGENTS.

AFTER Deadwood Dick had gone, Avalanche arose and started off for Quartz City, followed by his curious companion, the goat.

"Dickey means et," he muttered, slowly. "He means et, cuss old Florence's capacity fer fodder ef he don't. He ar' a hard customer w'en he's set on a subject, and I reckon I'd like ter find that wife o' his'n an' tell her ter skip, fer w'en Deadwood Richard sez he's goin' ter shoot a person, ye ken bet he'll go do et."

In hopes of running across Corduroy Charlie, the old Annihilator steered for Pretzel Pete's, but failed to find the Boy Bravo there, after which he visited several more of the dens which flanked the street.

"Ken't be they've knabbed the boyee, too," he muttered, dubiously, when he could find or learn nothing of Charlie. "P'raps Buster has seen something of him."

He aimed his footsteps along toward Lena Vernon's cabin, followed closely by Florence Night-in-a-gale, at whom the crowd stared or poked fun; but very few cared to further tackle the animal than with bantering words, for Florence had built up a reputation in Quartz City by knocking out the front teeth of a notable bully in first-class style.

Upon arriving at Buster's cabin, Avalanche found the girl standing in the doorway, watching the setting sun with her dazzling, fascinating eyes.

"Has Corduroy Charlie been here since we left this morning?" were the first words of the scout.

"No! why, what's become of him?"

"That's jest w'at I'm anxious ter find out. Great somnambulistic ham-bone that used ter pay nightly visitations ter old Joner's larnyx! ef thet boyee war ter hev any harm happen ter him, I'd never fergive myself." Then the old man further related about the abduction of young Madison's sister, and his interview with Deadwood Dick.

"Poor fellow!" the girl said, sympathizingly. "I hope he may find his lost sister, and I also hope that Deadwood Dick may not execute his threatened vengeance upon his wife."

"Why?"

"Because it can do him no good to kill her who was the mother of his child."

"Right, Buster, by ther great ham-bone. But he'll do et, an' don't ye fergit et. W'en Deadwood Dickey says he'll do a thing, he's a-goin' ter git thar, an' don't ye ferget et."

Then the Annihilator took his departure, striding back toward the "Big Schooner."

That night, owing to the previous night's success, the masked ball at the establishment of Pretzel Pete was repeated, and the ball-room was crowded, and

also the bar room, where the Dutchman dealt out "p'izen" to as rough and ill-assorted a gang of humans as ever lined a counter. There were oaths in a plenitude, and occasionally a knock-down, while in the ball-room males and females whirled under the brilliant light of the chandeliers, to the enlivening music discoursed by the German band whom Pretzel Pete had fetched from Pittsburg.

In the ball-room, with a very few exceptions, all were masked, the exceptions being such as did not care to dance, or knew not how.

Old Avalanche composed one of the exceptions, as he sat upon the top of a deal table at one side of the room, with his weapons and his faithful companion, Florence, by his side.

"Great authentic ham-bone!" he was saying, addressing his remarks to them around him who might be listening—"ef ther devil war ter see thes yere gang, he'd git skeered an' turn his tail an' skip. Holy Moses, o' bull-rushin' fame—wu'st—very wu'st gang o' human critters I evyer sot eyes on."

If any one had the courage to dispute the Annihilator's views, they evidently had not the ambition or desire, and so the old man relapsed into silence. But he kept his eyes, old and growing dim, though they were, upon the whirling mass of dancers beneath the brilliant chandelier light—especially upon a certain couple, when they were in sight.

The man was tall and slim—clad in a ranger costume, with a tall fur-beaver cap upon his head, and a mask upon his face, which wholly enveloped the features. The woman was shorter in stature than her companion, with a plump form, and brick-red hair, which fell over her shoulders in an untangled mass. Her face was masked from eyebrows to chin; her costume was a short dress, cut low in the neck, and a jaunty jockeyfied hat perched upon her head.

Both she and her cavalier were graceful dancers, and floated gracefully through all the changes without the least apparent confusion.

And this couple Old Avalanche watched sharply, his forehead contracted in a half-frown.

Once he caught the glance of the woman, but it was only for a moment, during which she seemed to halt, instinctively, and tremble; then she was whirled away into the mazes of the dance by her partner, and the scout lost track of them.

"Twere *her!*" he muttered, grimly—"her—Leone Harris! Great ham-bone thet layed siege ter ther interior kentry ov old Joner's constitution. I'll go an' get a sip o' tarant'ler, and then lay fer her, durn me ef I don't. Florence, ye beast, jest stay whar ye be, an' keep yer weather eye out. Ye know them as ar' my friends, an' know w'en things w'at ain't Christyun-like aire goin' on!"

The goat wiggled the stump of its tail in an understanding manner, and then Avalanche departed. When he returned he felt in a spirit more like to himself, and gazed around in quest of his game. He soon found the red-haired masker sitting quite alone on one of the side seats; but she started violently when she saw him approaching.

"Great Moses thet cavorted thr'u' ther historic bull-rushes! don't git skeered, mum; I ain't goin' ter harm yer, es I am a contagious eppydemic o' demolishun. Jest ye foller me out o' this yere ball-room, for I wanter hev a leetle talk wi' ye."

Without a word Leone Harris, for it was she, in truth, followed the old man, and soon they were out in the night shades of the vale, quite alone.

Then Avalanche halted, and faced her, with a strange grimness on his rough, grizzled features.

"Ye see, I know'd ye!" he began, with one of his peculiar chuckles—"know d ye jes' so well as my old mare Prudence Cordeliar uster know oats. A great animile, fer fodder were thet Prudence, mum—a terrific dispenser o' provender. But then, she warn't one side o' a slab fence ter my goat, Florence Night-in-a-gale. *Eat?* why, by ther eternal ham-bone thet disfigured Joner, she kin eat more in less time than any beast extant."

The masked woman had listened with evident impatience.

"Well!" she said, what has this to do with your bringing me out here?"

"Not much, thet's a fac'. But I thort I'd give ye an idea o' ther digestive capabilities o' my goat, Florence. Aster w'at I fetched ye heer for, I wanted ter give ye a leetle warning."

"Warning, sir?"

"Perzactly. You are Leone Harris. Thar! don't attempt to deny it, fer 'tis useless, for I know et. Yer red hair gives ye away. Shed hev know'd ye ef we'd met on ther ferry-boat crossin' Jordan."

"You are right; I am, or was Leone Harris before the devil tempted me and I had not the power to resist. Don't think to lecture me—I will not listen."

"An' Deadwood Dick, gal—"

"I have wronged deeply, and should be sorry, perhaps; but I ain't. I scarcely can credit the change in me during a few weeks, myself, but such change there is, that I would not go back to the tame, retired life for all the world. No, no!—not for Deadwood Dick, or the whole world!"

She spoke in a nervous, excited way, emitting her speech by little jerks. It was quite evident she had indeed fallen into a depth from which there was no extrication.

"Great ham-bone! kin et be thet ye no longer hev love for Dickey, ter whom ye bore thet leetle son who—God be praised—died in time to be spared this shame?"

"I do not think I care in the least for Deadwood Dick, Avalanche. When a woman sells her soul to the devil, love has little power over her. Had my child lived, I should never have come to this. Have you said all you wish?"

"No! I wish ter warn ye—faithless though you have turned out—ter look out fer Deadwood Dick. You may have heard that he has again taken to the road. It is so; I see'd ther boyee ter-day; he sw'ars thet he now only lives ter kill ye!"

"What! Deadwood Dick *kill* me! Ha! ha! let him try it! Know ye, old man, that I have power unsuspected by you or him. Let him but hunt for me, and he will fall into a trap which shall end in death!"

"Great salubrious ham-bone thet demoralized ther constitoochin uv old Joner! What hes *he* ever done thet ye shed wish ter destroy him?"

"Nothing; but when he tracks a tigress to make game of her, he will find his mistake. Please tell him so, if you see him, and that Leone Harris defies him!"

Then, without another word, the woman turned on her heel, and glided back toward the "Big Schooner," followed a few moments later by the old Annihilator.

He found that she had again joined the dancers, and was whirling away in the arms of the dandy ranger, with whom Avalanche had first noticed her.

As he was standing idly at one side of the great hall, there was an uproar in the bar room, and a moment later a gang of armed toughs, comprising Monk Morgan, Grizzly George, Skunk's Cabbage Abe, and several others, among whom was the "heathen Chinese," Clever Sam, and, headed by the lumbering bullwhacker, Jem McTurk, burst into the ball-room with yells and whoops.

As a consequence the band ceased to play, and the dancers huddled together, in alarm; for a "raid," headed by the notorious McTurk, had often been proved dangerous if not disastrous. Pell mell into the apartment the gang waltzed, with drawn revolvers, and took their stand upon various articles of furniture, commanding elevation. McTurk had been drinking deeply, and as he stood for a moment, glaring around upon the crowd, with a pair of heavy six-shooters in his grasp, nearly every one shrunk back as in dread of him, whose wolfish face was a mirror of an evil nature.

"Whar is he?" the bullwhacker at last bellowed, with a frightful oath—"Whar is ther nastly leetle

galoot they call Corduroy Charlie? I wantee see thet same cuss, an' chaw off his nozzle. Show him ter me! He's thar among ye masked fools—show him up, or gol dang yer ugly skins. I'll sic my purps, hayr, onter ye, an' let 'em scatter yer bones frum hayr ter Cheyenne!"

"Yes! et's Corduroy Charles we're arfter, or blood, an' hev one or t'other we will, hit or miss!" cried Monk Morgan.

"So haul him out, or down goes thes ediffs ker-slap inside o' ten seconds by ther least calkylation. Whoop him out, I tell ye!"

"Yesssee! yesssee! muchee findee Corduroy Charlie—gib himnee up to peacee commissioners!" asserted Clever Sam, with a huge grin, as he leveled, with the others, a pair of formidable revolvers at the crowd. "Melican manee muchee badee—Chinee man muchee cutee, likee debbil!"

"Holdt! stop!" cried Pretzel Pete, rushing in upon the scene. "Vat ish all dis drouble apoud? Vat vor all dish pig nonsense in my saloons? Shimminy gracious unt my vife Katrina! I gets me mad, unt I kicks you all out mit der street!"

"Hello! don't get excited, Dutchy!" howled McTurk. "What's ther use o' perrigrinatin' on yer ear, w'en ye ain't hurt? All we want ar' a feller called Corduroy Charlie—thet same festive coon who salivated me last evenin'! Tnet's w'at's our game, you bet. Peace Commissioners aire we, duly appointed by Unkle Samule ter lick out fer jest sech coons."

"Shimminy gracious unt my vife Katrina! den vy don't you vas go find him?" expostulated Pete, in high dudgeon. "Ve no keep Corduroy Sharlie here, I dells you."

"Shet up, ye old blowhard! Leddies an' gentlemen, ter av'ide trouble, ye'll please unmask!"

"That's ther way ter tell ef Corduroy Charlie's heer. Off wi' yer face kiverin', every one o' ye, or I'll make sum funerals a vital necessity!"

With alacrity the masqueraders began to drop the coverings from their faces, for all were in awe of the bullwhacker, who held life so lightly in regard.

Soon the faces were all unmasked and turned toward the Peace Commissioners for inspection.

It took but a glance from McTurk to tell that Corduroy Charlie was not among them, and he leaped to the floor with an oath.

"Hurra! boys—the galoot ain't hayr, an' we must s'arch till we find him. Kerwhoop! fifty dollars ter ther galoot as fetches me ther skunk w'at salivated me out in ther gulch!"

The roughs gave an assenting yell, and were about to rush out into the night, when there was a series of wild, rollicking whoops, and a stream of horsemen came pouring into the ball-room.

All were masked and armed to the teeth, and clad in mountain costume, and at their head rode one whom all recognized with the single exclamation:

"DEADWOOD DICK!"

And so it was.

CHAPTER VIII.

IN THE BALL-ROOM—UGLY ANN AND HER TOOLS—M'TURK'S DEFEAT.

IN an instant the greatest consternation prevailed within the ball-room. Men shrunk back and grasped their weapons; women shrieked with terror, and attempted to fly, but were in most cases prevented by the walls of humanity which surrounded them. All this confusion and chaos of disorder was because of the appearance of one man and a dozen of his companions—the notorious Deadwood Dick & Co.

"Hello! Shimminy gracious unt my vife Katrina; vot ish der meaning mit dish drouble?" Pretzel Pete demanded, as he mounted the barrel just vacated by the bullwhacker, McTurk. "Vot vor you come into mine saloon mit horses on your packs, you pig, unmannerly loafers?"

"Whoa-up, old man!" Deadwood Dick replied; "coolness should be your motto on such an occasion as this. You'll no doubt get it hot enough hereafter.

It so happens that I have a deserting wife among this throng, and I have come for her. If you people will all remain quiet a moment, I will find her and take a quiet departure. Otherwise—well, you know about how Deadwood Dick's raids turn out!" and there was a quiet smile beneath the mask as the road-agent ceased speaking.

"Ladies unt shentleman, you vill blease keep so still ash von mouse, on lil dis roadt-agent takes his departure," announced Pretzel Pete from his barrel. "Deadwood Tick hash very much reputation av peim' a pad cusdomer."

There was a shout of laughter from the masked road-agents, and an equal volume of curses from the roughs under Jem McTurk.

"You will find it to your advantage to follow your host's direction, ladies and gentlemen," Deadwood Dick said. "Undoubtedly, as he intimates, I am a bad customer when you get me riled. You all may have heard of me, and that my wife, Leone Harris, has deserted me for a double-dyed wretch called Handsome Hal. That she and her pard are in this room, I am satisfied. You will please stand still, while I ride among you and scan each face."

It was a request and yet an order, and no one seemed desirous of disobeying it, for the road-agents sat like statues *en saddle* with cocked revolvers.

And Deadwood Dick rode carefully about among the crowd within the great ball-room, those magnetic eagle eyes of his sweeping the sea of faces in a sharp, searching glance that required no second look for assurance.

How many, male and female, shrunk back as they encountered the stern, unflinching gaze of the road-prince! How many trembled lest he should smite them—he who was believed to fear neither death nor the devil!

A strange hush pervaded; naught was heard except the tramp of the animal's feet, which bore the road-agent through the room. Every one seemed to stand with bated breath waiting the issue, whatever it might be.

"Ha!"

The ejaculation now suddenly escapes Deadwood Dick's lips, and he raises his revolver, and fires at two forms just disappearing through a rear door of the ball-room—the figures of red-haired Leone Harris and her cavalier. But he fired too late for the bullets to take effect, as was evidenced by a mocking laugh which came floating back into the room.

"Baffled this time!" he muttered, with a bitter chuckle, "for she evidently was expecting me. Another time I shall take her by surprise. Away, boys, away! Remember we have a stage to toll at midnight!"

Then, as suddenly as the lightning flash radiates the clouded heavens, there came a glare of vivid flashes, a cannonade of sharp, spiteful reports, the trampling of iron-shod feet and violent screams of horses, intermingled with oaths, wild yells of laughter, and stentorian orders.

This pandemonium of sounds for a few seconds—then it was discovered that the road-agents had taken their departure from the "Big Schooner."

Nobody had been hurt—the pistol-shots and yells had been the finale overture of the daring pirates of the trail, previous to their departure.

"Shinminy gracious unt my wife Katrina! if dish ish dersort off vatermellons you grow oud mit der Pluck Hills, I sells oul my place, go pack mit Pittsburg unt sell three-cent lager, so help me!"

"Oh! that's only an interlude in ther active drama of mining life, Pretzel Peter the Great!" assured Mr. Andy Adair. "Ye must git used ter sech things, ye parseeve, an' when ye're wisited by sech shinin' lights as Deadwood Dickey, not go a perigrinatin' off on yer ear, as ye did ter-night. At sech times ignorance ain't bliss by er long chalk!"

An hour later four men were standing in the darkness which enveloped the vale—four burly, brawny men, and a creature which might have been taken

for a woman, as the dress and hood which hung back upon the narrow shoulders seemed to indicate that sex.

The men were none others than the bullwhacker, Jem McTurk, the ruffian and gambler, Morgan, and their confederates, Grizzly George and a fellow known as Bison Ben, from his shaggy appearance. The woman was, in every sense of the word, a horrible looking old hag, with disheveled hair, shrunk features, and evilly-gleaming, coal black eyes, while her mouth was large, and disclosed a few long, fang-like teeth. The complexion of her skin was suggestive of jaundice; and her form was shriveled and bony, the few rags she wore being illy-sufficient to cover it.

She carried a crooked staff in her hand, and would have reminded one of a witch such as are told of in ancient fairy tales.

"Auck over my durned equilibrium, ef ye ain't a hoss!" Jem McTurk was saying. "Hayr ye're surroundin' us wi' bizness thet'll keep our hands bizzy. Ye got ther crippled gal w'at Monk, hayr, sent ye, eh?"

"Yes!" the hag replied, in a harsh, squeaky voice.

"I got her all right, and she languishes a captive in the dungeons of the Temple of the Sun-God. She will make a fine morsel for ther sacrifice!"

"No doubt," and the bullwhacker shuddered at the hag's coolness, though he well knew it was her way to be cool and calculating, when working deviltry, even though at other times she were afire with consuming flames of insanity.

"You ar' sure o' one victim, mum!"

"Bah! only *one*!" cried the hag, fiercely. "I must have more—more for the glorious quarterly sacrifice to Quoloro, the Sun-God. His warriors at the temple are hungry for the sacrifice! Five shall there be sacrificed. Quoloro has commanded it, and sent Ugly Ann, his agent, to search for fat victims. She *has* searched, when night has overshadowed the land. She has found plenty of victims. The red-haired wife of Deadwood Dick; the beauty of the vale whom the miners call 'Buster'; the Chinaman and the red chief, Bad Medicine, and the youth, Corduroy Charlie. All these must know the sacrifice to Quoloro, the Sun-God! Ugly Ann has said it, and you, her agents, must do her will!"

The four ruffians stared at each other doubtfully, and then at the half-crazed hag, who had worked herself into savage excitement.

"You need not hesitate!" she shrieked, in a sudden fury, as her sharp gaze caught their glances. "What care you what your hands do, so long as you get gold? Have I not always paid you? Look!" and she brought four pouches made of buckskin from beneath her tattered shawl. "Here is gold for each of you, to do my bidding—more gold than you could mine in a month!"

"Good enough! We're yours, truly, old gal!" McTurk cried, seizing his pouch.

"S'pose ye'll hev yer kurrier cum ter ther old place fer ther 'stock'?"

"No! no! Dauldo was torn to pieces in the bear's den this morning, and you all must bring yer victims ter ther Temple, an' witness the glorious sacrifice!"

"But I reckon we won't, mum!" McTurk said, grimly. "We ain't partial ter seein' hullsale butcherin' did, even ef we do drop our man oncet an' aw'ile. Reckon ye'll hev t' excuse us."

"Excuse ye? *No!*" cried Ugly Ann, savagely. "Don't dare to refuse to come! You know the fate of those who have refused to obey my orders. Well, you shall follow them if you refuse. Remember! I never make idle boasts!"

And without another word the hag wheeled about and hurried away into the darkness.

"Cuss her!" McTurk growled as he glared in the direction she had gone. "W'at ye think o' et, Monk?"

"Jest as I allus hev, thet she is a reg'lar old fiend-

ess!" the gambler replied, with a shiver. "I reckon et's no use fer us ter think o' doin' less than she hes ordered."

"On course not. Ye know w'at Clumsy Cal an' a number others got fer playin' shennannigan, an' we ain't no better'n them on ther dodge. 'Druther give a nugget than go see thet thar sacrificuss, 'ca'se et allus goes ag'in' my grain ter see any killin' done onless I take a hand myself. Then I'm all right, ye bet!"

"Wonder whar ther old rip pits the gold she gives us?"

"Sh!" McTurk cautioned with an evil grin—"not so loud. Thet's for us ter find out, w'en we wisit ther Temple o' ther Sun-God. We must solve ther mystery. Ther old woman is crazy, an' them idolatrous red-skins, w'ich aire pickings out o' half a dozen different nations, all believe thet she hes more than mortal power, I suspect, an' accordingly serve her, out o' reverence an' fear. Et must be our purpuss ter find whar she keeps her gold, an' help ourselves. Now then, scatter, an' lay fer ther game, lively!"

Lena Vernon, or "Buster," was sitting in her cabin, a short time after the events last recorded, mending a cut in the jacket of the suit of male attire she had worn on her first meeting with Corduroy Charlie. She was all alone, but this caused no thought of fear to enter her mind; she had lived long enough in the rough mining country of the West to have little thought of the danger which constantly surrounded her.

She found much to think of as her deft fingers plied the needle—for food for thought had come to her with the coming of Charlie Madison.

She was conscious that his comely appearance had impressed her and excited her enthusiastic admiration.

She knew that he was the only one whose glance had ever thrilled her with that exquisite sensation of first love—well, it made her young heart beat wildly when she thought of him, short though had been their first meeting.

The candle-light revealed the rosy coloring on her cheeks as she sat sewing, and occasionally a soft little smile that came to and departed from her lips.

So engaged were her thoughts that her ears failed to detect the sound of the opening and closing door; she was ignorant that another person was in the room, until she chanced to glance up, and beheld a man standing almost in front of her, and that man none other than Jem McTurk.

"Haw! haw!" he laughed hoarsely, as she sprung to her feet in astonishment. "Didn't expect to see me, did ye, Buster!"

"No, indeed. How did you gain entrance?" the girl demanded.

"Thr'u' ther door, on course, daisy. Ye see, I hed a leetle bizness ter transact wi' ye, an' so I kim right in wi'out ceremony. Thar! sit down, an' I'll do ther same."

"No! I won't sit down!" Buster cried, glancing nervously toward an opposite corner where her weapons were, for she well knew the class of villain she had to deal with. McTurk caught her gaze, and took pains to put himself between her and them, at the same time drawing and cocking his formidable "six."

"No ye don't!" he said, with a triumphant leer; "reckon I know how ye sling lead, an' ye ken't grip no 'bull-purp' while I'm around. Sit down, I tell you, or I'll—"

Lena obeyed without answering. Brave though she was, she dreaded this man, McTurk, more than any other ruffian in Quartz City. Why, she could scarcely have told, herself.

"Thar! sit, now, an' open yer ears!" the bullwhacker—that had been said, as he half-squatted upon a camp-stool. "Be reason'ble, an' ye'll git ter glory in short order, you bet!"

"What do you mean, Jem McTurk?"

"Hey? w'at do I mean? Waal, et'll take a leetle story ter tell thet, an' I mought as well tell ye. Ye've heerd uv a tribe o' Injuns, no doubt, who belong in ther mountains, not more'n a dozen miles from heer. They're called the 'Warriors o' ther Sun-God'—a sort o' idol they worship bein' o' thet name. Every season o' ther yeer, they sacrifice some livin' critter ter this god, humans bein' their preference. This yeer they propose ter make more sacrifices than usual, and have elected me ter s'arch fer material."

"You, Jem McTurk! You searching for victims for these barbarous wretches to murder!" Lena exclaimed, in horror.

"Waal, yes, I reckon thet's about et, an', as they're fond o' pritty subjects, I thort you might an-ser ter a dot."

"Great God! What do you mean, you brutal wretch?"

"Jest w'at I sed, *perzimi*! Old Ugly Ann sed you war her huckleberry, an' so I've cum ter appropriate ye!" and, with a gloating grin, the ruffian rose to his feet, and advanced a step toward poor Lena!

She, too, sprung from her chair, and leaped toward the door.

"*Help! help!*" she screamed, just as McTurk slapped a heavy hand upon her shoulder.

And her cry was not unanswered.

The door was suddenly flung open, and a man stepped into the room.

It was Lieutenant Cressly; and the bullwhacker released Lena and stepped back as he saw him.

"Hello! by the devils, what does this mean?" the lieutenant demanded. "What are you up to, Jem McTurk?"

"He was about attempting to carry me off, brother!" Lena Vernon cried, indignantly. "He is a brutal wretch!"

"I war jest playin' a leetle joke, ye see!" McTurk ventured, hesitatingly.

"Bah! none of your lying to me!" Cressly said, sternly. "Who sent you here?"

"Ugly Ann!" the ex-bullwhacker grinned.

"The devil! Who for?"

"For Buster!"

Cressly leaped back with a vile oath.

"Curse her! what does she mean?" he growled.

"You can go, sir; look out ye don't show up here again. I'll see about this directly. Go!"

The ruffian slunk from the cabin like a whipped cur; then Cressly turned upon Lena Vernon, who was his sister

CHAPTER IX.

A BIT OF REVELATION, AND BUSTER'S PROMISE—IN THE CANYON—A RESCUE.

THE face of the so-called lieutenant was stern and pitiless as he faced the beautiful girl, Lena Vernon. And she trembled, for in his savage moods he was fierce and oftentimes brutal.

"Well?" he growled, interrogatively, as if he expected her to speak—"well, what have you to say for yourself?"

"What do you mean, Dion? I do not understand you. I am sure."

"You don't, eh?" he replied, with a sarcastic sneer. "Well, I'll enlighten you. Last night I came here, and was refused admittance by that old idiot whom you call Avalanche. He denied that you were here, but that was a lie, as I peeped in through a crack and saw you, previous to knocking. I also saw another—a beardless chap, whose arm you had just dressed in an affectionately skillful manner. Who was that, pray?"

"Oh! that was Mr.—Mr.—Corduroy Charlie, brother. He was wounded in a street duel with Jem McTurk."

"Exactly. I chanced to be a witness to the duel. He is my enemy!"

"Your enemy?"

"Exactly, again. One of the bitterest in my calendar. Let me relate:

"A year or so ago, when I took a trip to California, leaving you in Denver, I stopped off at Stockton, and as it happened, chanced to engage board with this Corduroy Charlie and his crippled sister.

"In a moment of indiscretion, I thoughtlessly offended them, and it appears they have cherished a deep-set rancor for me and followed me here for the purpose of a deadly revenge. And you had the bitterest enemy of my life, ministering to his wants!"

"But how should I know of it, Dion, when you never told me?"

"Well, you know it now, and let it be a warning to you. Moreover, you must tell me where the accursed rascal is hiding, for you alone know."

"I do not know. He left here with Avalanche, this morning, early, and I have not seen him since."

"Stop! girl! do not anger me with your lies. Tell me where he is, or by my life, I'll not remember that you are my sister, or a woman. Tell me, I say!"

Lena rose to her feet, her cheeks flushed, and eyes glowing, brightly.

"I have told you once and for all that I do not know where he is. I cannot say more, no matter what you do!" she said, coldly.

"But I'll make you! curse you, I'll make you tell. I'll recall McTurk, and he shall take you off to the sacrifice!"

"Enough! Dion Avery! you are no brother of mine after that threat, and if I knew, I would never betray Corduroy Charlie's whereabouts to you—never!"

"Then McTurk shall obey Ugly Ann's commands!" the villain said, rising. "When death stares you in the face, you'll find it beyond my power to help you!"

"Oh! Dion, how can you be so cruel, when I know nothing of the young man?" and Buster burst into a fit of weeping, which Cressly, otherwise Dion Avery, failed to notice was wholly affected.

"Cruel? Well, I'll give you one chance. Go seek this Corduroy Charley, and betray him to me. Will you do it?"

"Yes!"

The girl spoke eagerly, but with a dark gleam in her beautiful eyes.

"You promise?"

"I promise."

"Very well; your life will depend upon your keeping that promise. Don't think to trifle with me, or attempt to escape. A spy chosen from the barbarous Sun-God worshipers shall constantly dog your footsteps, though you may not see him."

Then the lieutenant turned and strode from the cabin, slamming the door after him.

"Yes! yes!" the brave girl muttered, going to the window and peering out into the darkness, "I will go in search of Corduroy Charlie, but *not* to betray him to you, my villainous brother—far from it. He shall find that brother and sister, even, can play at different games."

"Come along, boys; I reckon we've got ther game purty nigh cornered!"

The speaker was the ruffian gambler, Monk Morgan, and he was accompanied by half a dozen of his confederates, including Bison and Grizzly George.

In the night's dense gloom they were skulking through the deep northern canyon, which opened out of the vale, with revolvers drawn, and eyes peering forward with a manifest eagerness.

For an hour they had been upon the trail of Corduroy Charlie, like human bloodhounds, and they meant to find him, and capture him for the sacrifice. Stealthily forward they stole, their footsteps scarcely causing a sound, their breaths coming and going in concert.

Nearer and nearer to the place of the supposed

concealment of the young Bravo—then all of a sudden the canyon and the night became as light as day as burning balls of fire were hurled down by invisible hands from a hundred quarters, some of them falling upon the surprised "peace commissioners," who retreated with howls of rage.

And while yet in this confusion, the clatter of hoofs was heard, and a horseman came dashing directly down through the storm of blazing balls.

With yells fraught with terror, all of the ruffians except Morgan turned and fled toward Quartz City as fast as their feet would carry them. The gambler was not made of the kind of clay instilled with cowardice; he stood still in his tracks, waiting with a gleam of desperation in his eyes, born of a controlled will.

He saw the horseman and recognized him, but raised not a hand on the defensive. He believed that there were doubtless a score of weapons leveled at him from the cliff above, and that he was virtually a prisoner.

The horseman was Corduroy Charlie.

He bore swiftly down toward the spot where the gambler stood; then drew rein by his side. Morgan met his stern glance unflinchingly:

"What d'ye want?" he demanded, in a hoarse voice. "Ef ye're a road agent, ye won't get no haul out o' me!"

"I am no road-agent, and well ye know et," Charlie replied, fiercely. "You know why I stop to bandy words with a man of *your* worthless stamp. I want my sister, you wretch!"

"What d'ye calkylate I kno' about yer sister?" the gambler growled, fiercely. "I hain't seen her, an' don't know anything about her."

"Stop, you dog! don't lie to me. It was you that received her from the hands of my treacherous servant, Clever Sam. You must—you shall tell me where she is, or I will shoot you down without a thought. Speak!"

The gambler grew pale with apprehension, and made a movement suggestive of flight as the Boy Bravo's revolver-muzzle stared him in the face.

"Hold up! don't attempt to escape, as that will only hasten your death. Tell me, and I'll spare your life for the present. Quick, or I'll surely drop you!"

"Stop! don't fire!" Morgan gasped in alarm. "I'll tell you. The girl is in the power of the Worshipers of the Sun-God."

"What! dare you tell me this, you wretch—and you sent her there!" Corduroy Charlie cried, fiercely. "I'll kill you—"

"Stop! you will do nothing of the kind, sir!" Morgan replied, grimly. "Remember your promise—remember that only I have any power toward releasing your sister. Shoot me, and her fate is sealed."

Charlie reeled in his saddle, at the blow; it was a contingency he had not thought of for a moment.

"Ha! ha!" Morgan laughed, as he noted the effect of his words; "you weaken, I perceive. Mebbe ye ain't quite so brave as ye war!"

"Will you then give back my sister if I spare your life, you devil!"

"Waal, I won't promise fer certain, fer ye see life ar' uncertain, an' a feller hes ter be equally judishus in determinin' his course. Mebbe so; mebbe not."

"Curse you!" the young Bravo gritted, his patience relaxing. "You must either promise me, or *die*; so take your choice."

He spoke coolly, but there was a light of desperate resolution in his eyes.

He was enough of a judge of character to perceive that the gambler was a treacherous villain, who neither valued his word nor honor—a man hardened in the ways of a criminal life, who respected neither man or God."

He doubted not that the fellow had told the truth regarding poor Lily's whereabouts; indeed, he had believed her, almost since the first, in the power of those unknown enemies whom the author of the

anonymous note had mentioned as previously related.

"I must either promise or die, eh?" Morgan sneered. "Waal, I reckon ye ken take my word then, as I ain't in no mood fer takin' my eternal leap to-night. Cum ter my ranch, two doors north o' ther 'Big Schooner,' ter-morrer night at this time, an' ye'll git yer sister, sure's my name's Monk Morgan."

"Correct! I will be on hand. Go, now, and follow the gang of cowardly dogs you were bringing to capture Corduroy Charlie. Hereafter, look in your boots, before ye pull 'em on. You'll find it the safe-t."

With a curse, Morgan turned and strode back down the gulch from whence he had come, followed by a mocking laugh that caused him to shiver—a laugh he had heard before, and to which a significance was attached, for it was the laugh of the notorious Deadwood Dick.

And it was the road-agent, in person, who joined Corduroy Charlie, just as the gambler disappeared from view in the gloom; for the fire-balls on the canyon bottom had nearly burned out, and the night-shades were again settling down thickly.

"What ails you?" Deadwood Dick demanded, in surprise. "Why didn't you shoot the devil in his tracks?"

"Because that would have been sealing the fate of my poor sister," Charlie replied. "Did you not hear what he said?"

"Certainly. And what better are you off by allowing the human wolf to escape? His promise is but a trap to get you in his power, and you will never see your sister through *his* agency. You should have killed him on the spot, and then, having the knowledge of your sister's whereabouts, come to me."

"But what right have I to expect more assistance from you than you kindly extended to night?"

"The right a brother has to expect succor from a brother," Deadwood Dick replied, grimly. "Please remember that a man may be a road-agent and still a man. If you calculate I or any of my boys will desert a fellow-mortal who is fighting in the behalf of *women*, you make a mistake. I take the same interest in helping you toward finding your sister as if she were my own, and you may be assured of my personal aid."

"Thank you—I thank you with all my heart!" Corduroy Charlie cried, warmly grasping the gloved hand of the prince of the road. "Though our occupations ain't quite the same, that should be no bar to our friendship."

"Good enough. It is a pity you didn't shoot that tough, as he may trouble your path yet."

"There's a chance to settle with him. I shall now return to town and brave my foes, if they lay for me."

"That would be my advice," Deadwood Dick replied. "Sail in and let 'em know that ye ain't afraid of the best of 'em. That's the way I earned my reputation and notoriety in the Hills."

Then, after a few more words, Corduroy Charlie shook hands and parted with Deadwood Dick, after which he strode down the canyon and entered the vale where nestled Quartz City, as mapped out by a myriad of gleaming lights.

"I wonder where I had best go?" he muttered, as he stood a few seconds at the mouth of the canyon, and gazed upon the scene which lay before him.

"I would like to see that fellow they call Old Avalanche, and also the girl, Lena Vernon. Why was it, I wonder, that I was so strangely impressed with her appearance? She seemed to remind me of some one, yet, for the life of me, I could not tell whom. Rather pretty and fascinating; no doubt would make an agreeable subject to make love to."

A faint glow of beauty shone in his eyes at thoughts of the belle of Quartz City, as "Buster" had often been called.

"I wonder who she is and where she came from?"

Does Avalanche know anything about her? As I fancy, he is no way related to her. Hello! what's up?"

He ceased soliloquizing and listened intently.

From below him, in the depth of the valley, came the sound of muffled cries—evidently of some person in distress.

"Something gone wrong!" the young bravo muttered. "Perhaps it might be well enough to investigate!"

He drew one of his revolvers, and then stole away down the slope, through the dense gloom of the night. His footsteps were scarcely audible even to himself, and he was prepared for any emergency as he kept on.

The further he went the plainer became the sound of harsh words. Before him loomed up a growth of stunted chaparral, and within its covert Charlie was satisfied was the person or persons from whom the words emanated.

So he crept stealthily along, and in five minutes had attained a position overlooking a peculiarly strange scene. Within a little glade a man was lying prostrate upon the ground, bound hand and foot, while over him stood an old hag, with wrinkled, yellowish features, and tattered garb.

In her hand she held a long, threatening knife, which she occasionally flourished close to the face of the man, who was evidently her prisoner.

"Speak, Judson Wardville!" she exclaimed in a shrill, harsh voice; "speak! promise me what I demand, or I'll murder you where you lay, as I said. Your time is almost up!"

"I have already counted five hundred, but a hundred remains to be counted. If you do not answer to my demands, your life shall pay the forfeit."

"On the contrary, if you don't make yourself scarce, I'll put a bullet through your cranium in short order!" Charlie said, stepping from his concealment, with a pair of six-shooters bearing upon the would-be murderess. "Come, start! or you're a goner, sure's I know how to thread a needle!"

The hag wheeled toward him with a fierce malediction, but the moment she perceived that he was better armed than herself, she slunk away into the chaparral.

Approaching the prisoner, Corduroy Charlie drew his knife, severed the bonds, and assisted Mr. Wardville to his feet.

"You will excuse me!" the released man said, hurriedly, "but I have not time now, more than to thank you. But I shall not forget your face; good-evening, sir. I must pursue that old woman," and abruptly he dashed off through the chaparral, much to the astonishment of Charlie.

And the released prisoner had barely left the glade, when another man suddenly entered it and confronted our hero.

CHAPTER X.

OVERPOWERED—MCTURK ??. FLORENCE NIGHTINGALE.

THE man was the masked, silver-bearded individual who had once confidently advised Corduroy of McTurk's prowess, and whom everybody had nicknamed Silver Beard, for want of a better appellation.

There was no change in his appearance now more than when Corduroy had first seen him, except that he carried a rifle, and his belt was tucked full of weapons.

He seemed startled as he recognized the young Bravo, and came to a halt directly in front of him.

"You?" he ejaculated. "Excuse me, for I thought it was some one else. But, since I have met you, I want to have a little talk with you."

"With *me*?" echoed Corduroy.

"Exactly. Down here a bit is a respectable saloon, where we can sit in privacy and converse. Come!"

"Yas; but hold up! How do I know who you are, or what kind of a trap you want me to enter?"

"Never fear; all is right. To assure you, I am the

Unknown from whom you received an anonymous warning some time ago. So you need not hesitate, as my intentions are good."

Corduroy Charlie did not reply, but followed after the stranger with an eagerness not born of assurance but of curiosity.

The events of to-night, and the knowledge he had attained, had put him in a quandary—in a perplexity of doubt and assailing fears, and if this silver-bearded individual could throw any light upon a dark past, he meant to receive it.

For the past—the early childhood and birth of himself and poor Lily—had been hidden in a cloud of obscurity; of their parentage they knew literally nothing. From the age of ten dated their recollection. They were then the foster-children of Dudley and Margaret Madison, whose name they bore, and with whom they lived until Charlie was fourteen, when both Madison and his wife died of fever, and left Charlie their little farm outside of Stockton, Cal.

It was not until after the death of Mr. and Mrs. Madison that these foster-children learned that they were not their own children by birth, but parentless waifs who had been adopted at a tender age. It was a hard blow, but Charlie bore up under it manfully, resolving to never forget it, and some time to search out his pedigree. He ever was haunted by a horrible face he had seen in his early boyhood—a face that menaced. He never forgot it; to-night he had seen the face bending over the prisoner in the chaparral.

How was the old hag connected with the mystery of his life?

Could this stranger explain?

These were the questions in consideration as he followed in the steps of Silver Beard. And they were momentous questions to him.

They descended into the valley, and soon came to a cabin somewhat isolated in location from the rest. A light shone through the windows, and over the door was hung a banner transparency with the words in attractive letters,

"THE CASINO."

Without ceremony Silver Beard entered, and Corduroy followed, to find himself in an ordinary bar-room, flanked on two sides by stalls for beer drinkers, and occupied by a few miners who sat around smoking their pipes.

Silver Beard led the way to a retired stall, ordering cigars as he passed the bar. When they were ensconced in comfortable positions, and the cigars lit, the old man spoke.

"I suppose you have much desire and curiosity to know what I want of you?" he said, in a low tone. "One thing is to ask why you did not regard my advice in my note of warning? Why did you come to this place when I warned you to keep clear of it? Please tell me that."

"Well, I reckon'd it was none of your business where I went, and so I steered ahead. I had got up on the trail of my enemy, and nothing short of a superiority of force could have turned me back."

"And by coming here you have put yourself in a hornets' nest. Your sister has turned up missing, and your own life is in imminent jeopardy!"

"How do you know? What do you know about me, anyhow?"

"Ah! young man, much more than you have the least idea of. Very much more, sir. Doubtless you are aware that a mystery enshrouds the early years of your life?"

"Yes! yes!"

"Well, I am acquainted with the whole story, and well know your parents."

"What! can it be possible that they are still living without my knowledge of who they are?" the young Bravo exclaimed, starting to his feet. "Go on! tell me all! all! everything which I do not know!"

"Alas! you ask what is impossible, young man. Though I am the possessor of that knowledge you

would acquire, my lips are unfortunately sealed with an oath too horrible to be broken, until death breaks it;" and the man bowed his head low, with a groan.

"What! cannot tell me? Then, why did you bring me here to torture me?"

"It was to warn you, again, that I brought you—to warn you to fly from this place, where dwelleth your bitterest enemy. Think not of your sister, for she is beyond the power of your aid, were you to stay. Fly! while there is time, and save a life which may be a great blessing to the country."

"Never! while poor Lily is calling in vain for me to come to her!" Corduroy Charlie replied, sternly. "Crazed though she is, she is all that I have left to live for, and fight for. Tell me one thing, sir, which I feel assured you know—who was the woman I saw in the glade, a moment before you came? an old hag with yellow skin and tattered garb? Tell me, who?"

"That was Ugly Ann, the Prophetess of the Sun-God—your bitterest, deadliest foe. Beware of her, for if she fixes her eyes on you, your life is hardly worth speaking for. Take my advice, and let another night fall upon you far from this town."

"By no means," Corduroy Charlie replied, rising. "Now that I have got the scent of my game, I shall pursue it until I get it in my power. I thank you for your warning, but I must disregard it."

"Very well! I shall not warn you again. It may come that you will wish you had accepted my advice!"

Charley bowed, and left the saloon.

He was at loss how to arrange matters in his mind. Silver Beard was a riddle to him, without solution.

He felt that the man was a rascal, in spite of his vouchsafed warnings; but he did not reject the idea that danger might be lying in wait for him. Something seemed to tell him that it was, and a gleam of defiance entered his eyes.

"I have enemies!" he muttered, as he trudged down across the valley toward the main street, "and they will probably try to make me trouble. But they shall find that I am alert and ready. I need but one thing more to complete my outfit—"

"An' that's a pair o' handcuffs!" cried a jubilant voice, and before he was hardly aware of what had happened, he was lying upon the ground, securely bound, hand and foot.

The surprise had been complete.

At the least expected moment he had been taken, and by the very ones he had defied not an hour ago—Monk Morgan and his "peace commissioners."

They had lain in waiting, and accomplished their object.

About the same time of the capture of Corduroy Charlie, Old Avalanche was in the great bar-room of the Big Schooner, along with a motley assemblage of miners, adventurers and toughs, who were drinking and smoking and making the night hideous with their carousal.

The Great Annihilator was not sharing in the revelry, but stood on one side of the apartment, engaged in smoking his pipe, and watching those around him. Florence Nightingale was sitting upon his haunches, dog-fashion, and the two eccentrics seemed to attract considerable attention, as well as to excite numerous uncomplimentary remarks.

Among the roughs present were the bullwhacker, McTurk, and a few of his ilk, who, in general estimation, bossed the town.

The bullwhacker had already emptied two pint bottles of Pretzel Pete's perspiration-starting tarrantler and was feeling ingloriously tonguey and boisterous, when by chance he discovered the Annihilator and his "bull-dog," as the goat was familiarly known in Quartz City.

The two men were not the best friends, at any time, and to-night McTurk had the disposition to raise a "muss" with everybody.

"Hello!" he bellowed, in his prance about the room, "w'at hev we heer, b'yees? A goat—a livin' goat, as I live! Whoop her up, Mary Ann! did ye evyer see sech an ornery goat and goatee as them ar' two slouches thar ag'in' ther wall? Regular wild-cat breed, an' ugly as ary pair I ever see'd. I say, pilgrims, tell me w'at et is, an' I'll give et ter ye!"

This caused a general gurgle of laughter from the crowd; Avalanche looked coolly at the giant bully, who was nearly twice his size and weight; Florence, too, seemed to feel insulted, and curbed his head, and contracted his nostrils indignantly. While Pretzel Pete, who had seen enough disturbance for one evening, mounted the bar, with a heavy pair of army-navy revolvers in his clutch.

"Order! order! here, shentlemens!" he cried, in the tones of a Stentor. "I vill haff no more fuss mit my establishments—not vone! I shoood der fursed man vot says Shack unt Jill dwice, so helb me, Shimminy gracious unt my vife Katrina! I vas never in such a blace in all mine life. Et ish vorser as a mad-house, mit all der lunaticks got drunk ash fools on Weiss beer!"

"Oh! dry up, Dutchy!" cried one of the roughs, a "right bower" by the way, of the notorious McTurk. "Don't shoot off yer mouth any more, thes way, or I'll send ye peregrinatin' off on yer ear. Ef Honorable Mr. McTurk wants ter address thes heer meetin', hayr's w'at'll back 'im!"

"Hooray! hooray! an' heer, too!" yelled a chorus of voices. "Death ter ther galoot as sez Jem McTurk ain't our next president! Hooray!"

"Shimminy gracious unt my vife Katrina! did you ever heer der peed mit dose?" the astonished Teuton ejaculated, as he plunged abruptly back down behind his bar. "Ef dot veller git der pe president mit der United States, I move back mit Shermanny, so helb me!"

McTurk seemed flattered by the universal assurance of support by his brethren, and it also made him bolder.

He pranced up and down before the Annihilator, with folded arms, drawing his evil countenance into as many grotesque shapes as possible, winking and grinning, tantalizingly.

Avalanche knew well enough that the bullwhacker was ripe for a quarrel, but he resolved to give him no satisfaction. He stood leaning against the wall, eying McTurk in his cool, grim way, which was exasperating to the wild, untamed son of Colorado.

"Yas! ther great pet bullwhacker o' thes telephone line am I, Jem McTurk!" he roared, squatting and peering with belligerent gaze into the vicious countenance of the goat. "Oh! ye needn't look vinegar ner git wrinkles on yer ear, durn ye! I'm thar every time, aire I! Yas, an' I'll bet any galoot two ter one I ken butt harder than ary goat thet evyer see'd ther sun rise! Oh! whar art thou, ye soft-brained galoots, who wanten bet thet Jem McTurk ken't butt ther brains out o' thet goat? Whar aire ye, I say? Head ter head—two ter one I dash ther goat's head in!"

This novel proposal caused a titter of laughter to go around the room, and bets were made rapidly on the respective qualities of the coming game-cocks, if such they might be termed.

There was no gainsaying the fact that McTurk had a head of great proportions, and his skull was firm and hard as a rock. While on the other hand, Florence Night-in-a-gale was blessed with as tough a forehead as ever graced the goat kind, backed with a temper like an enraged cat, and a stubbornness that was unconquerable.

"Great ham-bone thet bucked ther larynx of old Joner!" Avalanche snorted, as his goat was seized by the horns and dragged out upon the floor. "Ye wanten be kinder keerful, pilgrims, onless ve're partial ter positive an' teetotal annihilation. Ye haven't ther smallest ijeer o' w'at a magazine o' demolishun ar' embraced wi'in ther constitoochinal dewellonments o' thet ar' same Florence Night-in-a-gale.

Lordy! Old Moses o' ther explorin' expedition thru ther Biblical bull-rushes! I onc't see'd thet same unruly beast ram her head ag'in' ther walls uv a meetin'-house up in Yankton; ther terrific jar reverberated ter ther telegraff offis, an' ther frightened operator sent a dispatch eastward o' w'at a fearful clap o' yearthquake they had in Yankton. Terrific? Why ye jest bet et war!"

A few smiled at the Annihilator's yarn, but the most of the crowd were too much engaged in the coming butting match.

A lane had been formed the whole length of the bar room, flanked on both sides by the spectators, and in this lane the contest was to take place. Florence was placed at one end, held in check by a couple of roughs until the proper moment, while McTurk took his position at the opposite end, on all fours, ready for the combat.

It was calculated that they would collide about midway in the lane.

It was an amusing scene, and well worthy of the brush of a Nast for illustration. McTurk on all fours, drawn back, ready for the start, and looking as belligerent as possible, while it was all the two guards could do to restrain the impetuous Florence from rushing at his enemy. For the goat seemed to have an actual hatred for the bullwhacker, as was evidenced by its eagerness to open the battle, and by the shaking of its head.

Perhaps, when he saw what was imminent, McTurk might have drawn off, but he knew such a thing would brand him with cowardice, and he resolved to back his bets, which were large.

Avalanche had also had time to bet largely on his game, for he had great faith that no species of the goat race better knew the science of butting than did Florence Night-in-a-gale.

At last everything was ready; the bar-room was crammed full; silence had been established; then Pretzel Pete, from the top of the bar, cried:

"Now, den, pring out yerswi minnit horses. Hip! yip! led 'em shlide!"

And the fun began.

CHAPTER XI.

HEAD TO HEAD—WARDVILLE'S STORY.

"GREAT rampageous ham-bone thet war ther fatal ailment uv old Joner!" roared Old Avalanche, with a snort of laughter, as Florence Night-in-a-gale bounced away down the lane with an indignant baa-a-a, and his knotted head curved in proud disdain. "Great shaders o' ther peregrinations!"

At the same juncture bounded McTurk away to meet his combatant, making a ludicrous spectacle as he bobbed along upon all fours toward the goat.

The crowd gave a great yell of delight as the two heads came together, making a report audible in any portion of the room.

"Hooray! Three yooops fer my Florence Night-in-a-gale!" yelled Old Avalanche, with a roar of laughter, as he saw the bullwhacker draw back and shake his tough head with a savage snarl.

"Ef ye ten find ther ekal ter my old rampageous j'int, pilgrim, hyar's w'at'll give an eagle fer ther beast. How d'ye like et, Honor'ble McTurkey—how did et feel about ther time ye felt et?"

"Shimminy gracious unt my vife Katrina!" cried Pretzel Pete from his stand on the top of the bar.

"Dose vas de toughest heads vot I never see'd before. I tink you no knock 'em ober mit von proad-ax, so helb me."

"I'll bet my nile on our next president, ther Honorable Mr. McTurk!" allowed another miner, and the two drew back for the second round—crouched back like the cougar, eye meeting eye with savage intention. Then came another collision, and Florence leaped back on guard. Not so with the bullwhacker. He keeled over backward, and then rose to his feet, rubbing his hand dolefully upon his bruised forehead, from which the blood oozed down over his face and into the corners of his eyes and mouth.

"Whoop! Great antiquated ham-bone w'at war

ther thorn o' Joner's rose-bud!" yelled Avalanche, dancing around with the hugest kind of delight. "Did ye see how purty ther beast give 'our next presydent' a headache? Look at him, an' tell thes old devastatin' eppydemic w'ich won ther match!"

"The goat! Three cheers for the goat!" proposed some one, and they were given with a zest that only fu ther increased the anger of the bruised bully.

"Devils! I'll murder the ornery brute!" he bel-lowed, grabbing a pi-tol from a bystander's belt and leveling it at the victorious Florence, who was sit-ting upon his haunches, dog-fashion, by the side of his master.

But he was not permitted to fire, for his weapon was knocked up, and the bullet sped ceilingward. Then he saw who it was that had frustrated his de-signs, and the crowd gasped:

"Buster! by thunder!"

"Yes, Buster, back again on the stage of active life!" was the girl's reply, as she stepped fearlessly into the ring so lately commanded by the belligerent head-butters. "I reckon ye'd better git, Jem Mc-Turk, befor I tell these natural guardians of mine something th it will cause them to hang you up to a tree!"

The bullwhacker uttered an invective as he glared for a moment at the fearless and beautiful girl; then he turned and staggered out of the saloon, for he was dizzy and disconcerted by the severe butting he had experienced.

"There goes one of the worst wretches in the Hills, fellows!" the girl cried, as she watched him out—"a man who is a human ghou! at heart and in secret actions; for he is connected with those bar-barous wretches whom you have known as the War-riors of the Sun-God. He is one of the agents of the devil-woman, Ugly Ann, and if you wish to know where so many of your fellows have disappeared to within the past year, perhaps he could best tell you."

The miners and pilgrims stared around the bar-room into each other's faces, in surprise. This was news to them.

Spying out Avalanche, Buster hastened over to him with extended hands. She was looking won-drously fresh and beautiful, and every inch a young dandy, as she stood accoutered in her suit of gray, with a heavy gold chain strung across her vest, and a jaunty soft hat upon her regal head.

"Oh! I am so glad that I have found you, Alva!" she exclaimed, eagerly. "I feel sure you have got the news I seek—concerning the whereabouts of your friend, Corduroy Charlie!"

And a pretty blush stole upon the fair face as she spoke, and her gaze dropped under the quizzical stare of the grim scout. He laughed before speak-ing—a peculiar little chuckle quite original with him-self.

"So ye're soft on ther b'ye, eh?" he questioned, meditatively—"kinder tender an' sympathetic, whar he's got a finger in ther pie, eh?"

"Indeed, no," Buster replied, flushing with embar-tassment, for the scout's eyes had read only too sharply. "Why should I take any interest in a stranger, further than feel anxious for his welfare, as your friend?"

"Waal, I ken't say jest why, gal, for ye females aire as hard ter decipher as ther hieroglyphicks on old Cleopatra's darnin' needle. But I recky ye hev a leetle admiration for ther boyee, an' I ken't blame ye, as he's purty nigh *white*, he is."

"Be that as it may, I don't propose to discuss my likes and dislikes here," Buster replied, with a smile. "I spoke of Corduroy Charlie to find out of you had learned anything of his whereabouts."

"W'ich I ain't!" the Annihilator replied, grimly—"nary a I'arn. Reckon as how he's gone kicked ther pail, or else bin captured an' slain by old Ugly Ann's warriors."

"You don't really believe the latter, Alva, do you?"

"Waal, I don't b'lieve much else. I've s'arched

high 'n' low for ther la!l, but nary a hide nor hair can I find of him, which ar' a leetle suspicious."

"Indeed! yes, and I shall make it my business to find him."

"Reckon ye'll hev yer pains fer nix, gal. Besides, ye wanter luk sharp fer thet same McTurk. He ain't purtieklarly in love fer ye."

"Yes, I am well aware of the fact. But if he gets me in his power, it will be much more than I expect now."

"Great ham-bone! ye're a glorious trump, Buster. An' since ye're goin' ter lay fer ther resky o' Cordu-roy Charlie, thes great riotous eppydemic o' demoli-shun ain't goin' ter be fur behind!"

"Good enough!" Buster replied; and shaking hands for the last time, she turned and left the saloon.

Avalanche waited awhile; then he too quitted the place, returning to Buster's cabin.

But she was not there.

Early the following morning Judson Wardville en-tered the Big Schooner, and ascending to the hall-way above, knocked at the door of his suit of rooms. His wife, attired in an airy wrapper, ad-mitted him eagerly, but started back with an ex-clamation of astonishment and alarm as she viewed him, for he looked anything but the same man who had left her the previous evening with the assurance of a speedy return.

His face was scratched, and the blood had coagu-lated on it from the wounds; his eyes had a wild look, and his face was deathly pale; his beard had been torn out by handfuls, and his hat was gone, and clothing splashed and daubed with mud. Alto-gether he had the appearance of a man who had been upon a week's spree; and that he was fatigued was evident, for he sunk into a chair with a sigh of relief.

"Well—Judson—Wardville!" his good wife ejacu-lated, half between tears and laughter—"you're in a pretty condition, aren't you? Where, for goodness sake, have you been ever since last night?"

"Brandy! get me brandy!" Mr. Wardville gasped, excitedly. "I must have it to strengthen me!"

"You drink brandy—you, sir, a temperance man?" exclaimed his better-half, in horror.

"Blast temperance! Go fetch me the brandy, I say!" almost yelled the husband. "Go! start!"

Unaccustomed to such an exhibition of excitement and command on the part of her husband, Mrs. Wardville hastened from the room in terror, and de-scended to the bar-room below, where she purchased the largest bottle to be had of brandy, and hurriedly returned to her rooms.

Wardville seiz'd the brandy, as a drowning man catches at a straw, and dashing off the neck of the bottle, proceeded to gulp down the ardent as if his future salvation depended upon it.

Nor did he set the bottle upon the table until fully half of its contents had disappeared as if by magic.

"Ah! that's heaven!" he exclaimed, with a smile. "I suppose you are dying to know what is the mat-ter, Madge?"

"Not exactly dying, but wondering greatly!" re-plied Mrs. Wardville, sadly. "Last night I bid you good-by—for an hour, at the longest, you said—and here you come to me in a horrible state of disorder, and will not give a word of explanation until you have swallowed half a quart of the nasty stuff you call brandy. Really, I cannot understand, sir."

"Well, to tell the truth, I've been on the war-path, my dear!"

"On the war-path, Judson? Surely you have not allied yourself with the horrible Sioux?"

"Well, hardly, as I don't believe those savage ma-rauders would accept of so sorry a looking object as I must be. Though I am pretty well used up with exhaustion, if you will listen, I'll try and tell you what has happened."

As an assurance that she was not unwilling, Mrs.

Wardville dropped into a chair; and then after clearing his throat her husband spoke.

"After leaving you last evening, my dear, I descended to the street, proposing to have a quiet smoke. Without thinking what I was doing, I got quite away from the main street of the town, out into the valley, before I discovered the fact. In turning to retrace my footsteps, I received a hard blow, which must have stunned me, for I knew nothing more until I awoke to consciousness in a sort of chaparral glade, and found a frightful-looking hag bending over me. She was wild-eyed and yellow-skinned—a repulsive-looking object in the extreme; yet I could but recognize her features."

"You recognize her, Judson? Who could she have been?"

"Our enemy, Madge—she who was the curse of our early life—the viper that sought to slay us, then struck us even a harder blow—Alecia Madronna!"

"What! *she* here, Judson?"

"Exactly; and it was she whom I found bending over me. The moment I awoke to consciousness she began scratching and clawing me, and, being bound, I was powerless to resist. She recognized me, called me by name, and demanded to know in a mad frenzy why I had come—tried to force me to promise that I would go back to the States. This I would not promise, and I think she would eventually have killed me, but for the interference of a young ranger who drove her off, and released me. Scarcely pausing to thank him, I plunged off in pursuit of the hag. I chased her out of the valley, through gulches and over rugged mountain paths, with the zest of a hound. I was maddened—infuriated more than ever before, and I was bent on overtaking her, and forcing her to tell me where my children are. But the devil was leagued against me, and I finally lost sight of her in the mountains, and was forced to give up the chase."

"Ah! then our last hope is lost!" Mrs. Wardville moaned, piteously. "She will hasten to put our darlings out of our reach—to *kill* them, perhaps!"

"Do not despair, dear wife. My hopes are higher now than ever, for I believe the young man who rescued me to-night was our son!"

"Oh! God be praised! Did you speak to him?"

"Only to thank him, for his resemblance to you did not occur to me until a short time ago. I made inquiries for him on my return, but no one seemed to possess the least knowledge of his whereabouts."

"What will you do, dear husband?"

"What? Why, I'll get into some better clothing, arm myself, hire a guide, and set out in search of Alecia Madronna. Once she is captured, half the work is done. We can then pursue the search for our children with more safety. And God giving us his aid, I feel that we shall find them, whom we have so faithfully hunted during the past sixteen years."

"Amen!" responded Mrs. Wardville, fervently.

CHAPTER XII.

AMERICAN WONDERLAND—IN THE DUNGFON.

THE captors of Corduroy Charlie were the gambler, Monk Morgan, and his associates, Grizzly George and several others. They had stolen a march upon him, and now stood leaning over him, grinning out their triumph.

"Haw! haw!" Monk Morgan laughed, hoarsely. "That's ther time we got ye, I reckon, young feller. Ye war a leetle ter smart fer us in the canyon yonder, w'en ye fetched Deadwood Dick ter yer aid, but we've triumphed, at last!"

"Yes, you've triumphed in one sense of the word," Corduroy Charlie replied. "But, what good my capture is going to work you, I cannot see."

"Beca'se yer eyesight ain't good, ye see!" laughed the ruffian. "Ef ye know'd w'at heeps o' gold yer body an' soul'd bring in ther temple o' ther Sun-Worshippers, ye ked see plain enogh. Ye're goin' ter take a ride up thar, an' then git butchered afore a golden idol. Haw! haw! haw!"

Charlie did not reply.

He resolved to keep his thoughts, his doubts, his fears all to himself, under a mask, and await the issue.

He doubted not that the gambler had spoken truly concerning his fate, for he had learned enough since his coming to Quartz City, to apprise him that he need expect no mercy should he fall into the hands of Ugly Ann.

And that she had recognized him when he had driven her off and released Judson Wardville, he felt almost certain, for at the time he had noted a sudden searching glare in her eyes before she turned and fled.

Indeed, he felt in a small degree rejoiced that he had fallen into the hands of Ugly Ann's agents, for they would doubtless convey him to the mountain temple, where poor Lily had gone before him, and he might be able to turn a hand toward her rescue.

Monk Morgan and his villainous followers did not pause long for conversation but soon led a stud of fine horses from a neighboring corral, and mounted.

Corduroy Charlie was bound upon a spirited animal, and rode between Grizzly George and Bison Bill, while Morgan and his gang led the way.

They rode due southward across the vale, taking care to fight shy of the cabins, which were scattered around, and entered a rugged path along the mountain base, where it was necessary to ride in single file.

After following this in its winding course for some time, they descended into a deep narrow fissure between two towering walls of rock, where they still had to ride in single file.

Corduroy Charlie kept his eyes wide open as he rode between his guards, and noted each and every feature of the route over which they were traveling. He knew that they were advancing into the very heart of a wild, mountainous country, and that should he ever be granted a chance to escape from it, he must needs know which way to go. A few points taken now might be the means of his salvation then.

After following the narrow fissure for several miles, seemingly, they came into more open country, where there was an abundance of rocks and trees, and the earth was sandy and barren. Crossing this, they fairly entered the National Park, with its thousands of wonders of nature; its towering peaks and volcanic evidences of the past; its boiling springs and spouting geysers; its long, gloomy canyons and pine forests.

Day came sooner than Charlie had expected, and found them riding furiously along over lava tablelands thousands of feet above the sea level, leaping terrible chasms and avoiding treacherous sinks.

A prisoner though he was, the ride was one that Charlie enjoyed wonderfully; for there was something novel in dashing over the tops of mountains so far above the abode of humanity, where the Creator had evidently piled up his surplus material, after finishing the world, in an incongruous mass.

It seemed that they rode miles over this desolate waste of country, with its gleaming springs and spouting geysers, and crystal streams, ere they came in sight of anything higher to break the monotony.

During the whole ride not a word was spoken by the young Bravo's captors, except it was a curse at the wearied animals. They kept along a trail which had evidently been much worn, and made no halt until the noonday sun shone down fiercely upon their heads.

Then they halted at the foot of an abrupt mountain, whose whole sides, up to within a hundred feet of the top, were densely timbered with the evergreen pine. At the foot of the mountain was a rude shanty, part of which was used as a stable, and the rest tenanted by an Indian and his squaw.

Charlie also discovered the fact that there were several baying bloodhounds within the shanty.

A general dismount was made here, and the horses

given over to the care of the savage, after which the ruffians set out to pursue the continuance of the mountain trail, forcing Corduroy along with them. His feet had been released, but his hands were still confined, so that he had no show for escape, especially when Grizzly George and Bison Bill kept closely on either side of him.

The path up the mountain-side was steep and difficult of ascent for the first hundred feet, and only one accustomed to hunting trails would have dreamed of its existence. But, after the first hundred feet of ascent, Charlie was greatly surprised to find himself ascending steps of stone, which had been skillfully hewn or plied.

This rocky staircase continued for perhaps two or three hundred feet more, when they suddenly gained the summit of the mountain.

It was level, and fringed around its entire border with a row of tall, spectral pines, grown so closely together, as to make a hedge in many places impassable. Within this hedge was a space comprising some twenty acres of plateau, with grass growing luxuriantly here and there, and a few young deer trotting tamely about.

In the center of the space was an open stone edifice, with a roof of the same material, supported by massive granite columns. A sort of dais or throne rose up in the center, and on this was a massive stone chair.

At either corner of the temple leaning against the columns was an Indian warrior, armed with a long lance, and looking as solemn as though carved from the rock against which they leaned. Beyond this temple was a stone wall, which divided the summit park into two parts.

Immediately on emerging on top of the mountain, Monk Morgan ordered a halt, and, bidding his followers remain behind, he advanced toward the temple with uncovered head.

He addressed a few words to one of the guards, then was suddenly seen to descend through the floor of the temple, as if going into the bowels of the mountain.

He was gone for perhaps an hour, during which interval neither Charlie nor his captors moved from where he had left them.

At last, however, Morgan made his appearance, and approached with a grim smile.

"This is their place, younker," he said, addressing Corduroy. "I s'pose ye're already delighted w' ther prospect?"

"Not in the least. I see nothing to admire in this desolate region, unless I take into consideration the beautiful faces of my captors," was the sarcastic reply.

"Look out, ye galoot. Don't ram none o' yer sharp-edged barbs at our beauty!" the gambler growled. "Grizzly, you and Bison hold the rat while I blindfold him. Once we git him in the subterranean labyrinths of this mountain, you bet your life he won't see day ag'in till ther rezzereekshun!"

Accordingly the two ruffians seized hold of their victim, and held him in a firm grasp, while Monk Morgan passed a bandage over his eyes, and secured it behind his head.

Charlie made no attempt to prevent this work—indeed, what could he do, bound as he was? But he closed his teeth together with a snap, and registered mentally an oath of vengeance on the heads of these men who, for a little gold, were bearing him to a horrible death.

When he was blindfolded he was led forward, and soon found himself descending a flight of stone steps, accompanied by Morgan, the two guards, and the rest of the gang that had come from Quartz City.

At one time he had some doubts if they should ever reach the bottom of the staircase, so continuous seemed their descent. But finally the last step resulted in finding footing on the bottom of a hard, rocky passage, along which they marched with sharp, ringing tread,

The air was close and chilling, and occasionally Charlie heard water splash beneath their feet.

And it seemed to him that their route was the most angular and crooked he had ever traveled. For at the end of half an hour's steady march, he was completely mystified in regard to the direction of his entrance to the subterranean depths.

It was then that a halt was made; he heard a grating sound, and was pushed forward. He was followed by one of the guards, who removed the bonds from his arms, after which he quickly retreated, and there was a repetition of the grating sound and a ring of iron.

Now that his arms were free, Charlie quickly tore the bandage away from before his eyes, and gazed around him.

What met his sight was no more than he had anticipated.

He was locked within a strong, rocky dungeon, whose entrance was guarded by a stout, iron-slatted door.

This was secured by chains and bars on the opposite side, so that for one imprisoned within the dungeon, there was no possible escape.

The grim, evil faces of his captors he could see looking through the iron lattice-work, and it maddened him, but he withheld his anger by a strong, controlling effort.

"Haw! haw! haw!" roared Monk Morgan, jubilantly, "thar ye aire, younker, as nice as a bug in a rug. How d'ye like yer quarters? Neat an' snug enuff fer a prince, ain't they?"

"If you admire them, I'll exchange with you," Corduroy replied, with a glance around.

"Git out! I wouldn't be so gol-durned mean's ter rob ye o' yer comfortable roost, nohow!" retorted the ruffian, with a guffaw. "Couldn't nevyer forgive myself o' deprivin' ye o' yer nest, my gay robin!"

"How long am I to be kept here?"

"Waal, that depends. Ye see, ther old gal, Ugly Ann, hain't got back yet, an' we hey ter wait her notion. Most likely ye'll git a furst-class send-off as soon as she comes."

"Thank you. You may go now. When I want you I'll whistle!" Charlie said, with mock dignity, which elicited a yell of laughter from the ruffians.

They now turned away, however, and Charlie listened to them tramping along the dismal, rocky-hewn passage, until the sound of their footsteps was but a faint echo.

Then, with a sigh of relief, he began to inspect his surroundings.

He was fortunately not left in total darkness. A torch was thrust in a niche in the wall of the passage just opposite his door, and by the glare of it his dungeon was quite well lighted.

The dungeon he found to be furnished with a rude cot, covered with wolf-skin, and a table and chair.

Aside from these articles there was nothing but gray rock and the iron door.

The passage and the dungeon had evidently been chiseled out by the hand of man, and showed a taste of architectural sculpture quite surprising to find so far beyond the bounds of civilization. But the wonderful explorative discoveries of Professor Hayden, warn us not to be surprised at anything in the National Park, as still more wonderful discoveries of the systematic engineering of savages of past generations and ages are being brought to light weekly, in the still more northwestern territories.

Look at the remnants of underground cities that have been unearthed, suggesting new ideas, original with prehistoric man—almost as wonderful as the excavations at Pompeii and its surroundings! Hayden has truly remarked, that the ancient races of the National Park and far Northwest, aided by sublime nature, turned out some of the greatest wonders of the world.

The passage leading past the dungeon, Charlie could see, by peering through the grates, ran but a

few yards in either direction, when it turned an abrupt angle.

"I wonder, in fact, where I am!" he muttered, shaking the door, with a vain hope that he might be able to get it open. "It seems to me that I must be at the very bowels of the mountain; and it would puzzle me to find my way out, should I succeed in escaping from this dungeon. That I mean to do if it is within human power, for I have not the least desire to shuffle off this mortal coil yet awhile!"

His hands were free, and this was a great advantage. And furthermore, he was not unarmed, as his captors had supposed after relieving him of his belt-weapons and searching his pockets. On pulling off his boots, he drew out of the first a knife, and then a little seven-shooter, carrying a 22 cartridge.

"Ha! ha! they didn't quite leave me helpless, after all!" the prisoner muttered, as he examined his treasures. "The pistol counts seven stiffs, and the knife at least a couple, if I can only get out of this cell. Rather a grim *sell*, too, I take it. I wonder how soon any of that gang will be back here? I want to get out of this before long, in order to find something to eat. Must be pretty near dark out o' doors."

A glance at his watch, which the ruffians had not molested, showed him that it was six o'clock P. M. As he stood gazing around him, meditating on how to act first and best, his eye rested upon the rough pine deal-table, to which he had given but a casual glance before. Now, however, he gave an exclamation of surprise, and approached it curiously.

CHAPTER XIII.

SEEKING ESCAPE UNDER DIFFICULTIES.

It was a common affair, unvarnished and illy-made, evidently having some day served its purpose as card-table in some mining strike.

But what called Corduroy's attention to it was the fact that it had a little drawer, perhaps two feet wide, as many long, and half a foot deep, affixed in its bed. This was singular, as none of the common deal-tables sported such accommodations; and, moreover, the drawer had a key-hole, suggestive of an inside lock.

"I wonder what secrets this old concern has for me!" Charlie muttered, with a chuckle, as he dropped his weapons into his boot-legs and then gave the table a good shaking. "Hello! there's something in that drawer, too!"

He seized hold of the knobs, but the drawer refused to open. It was locked.

"Fastened, eh? and I haven't a key. Wonder if it's worth my while to bust the old thing open? If I was sure of finding tools or victuals, I'd make short work of it, I reckon. Ah! the top of the table is fastened on with screws, and I can work them out with my knife."

He set to work at once, keeping an eye, however, out in the passage, to prevent being surprised. The screws were old and rusty, and turned hard.

But he finally had them all loosened, and then hesitated before lifting the top. What mystery was to be revealed to him? What secret did the drawer contain?

He glanced around—no one was in view. Then, a trifle nervously, he raised the wide pine board, and gave a glance into the space disclosed.

He gave a yell of surprise, and dropped the board upon the rocky floor.

The drawer was *half full of yellow nuggets of gold*, varying from the size of a bean up to a robin's egg, and in several cases as large as a hen's egg. Yes! pure shining gold, free from rock or dirt—the genuine simon-pure article.

Corduroy Charlie gave a gasp of astonishment, as he gazed upon the gleaming treasure.

But as the echo of approaching footsteps smote upon his hearing, his quick presence of mind asserted itself.

He seized the board, whose noise in falling had evidently attracted the attention of a guard, and

quickly returned it to its place on the bed-piece of the table, slipped the screws into his pocket and the knife into his boot-leg, after which he threw himself in a lounging position upon the cot.

And just in time!

A moment later a horribly-painted savage and Monk Morgan presented themselves before the grated door.

"Hello! in hyar! W'at war thet racket in thes direction, a little while ago?" the gambler demanded, with a curse. "Sounded like as if a hull lumber pile hed tumbled down."

"Ha! ha! can't a fellow turn his bedstead upside down, to see if it is inhabited by bugs?" replied Charlie with a laugh. "Guess you must be nervous, if you get frightened at a little noise."

"Didn't know but ye war layin' fer ter escape!" Morgan replied, grimly. "Thet wouldn't do, ye see, beca'se ther b'ars an' beasts'd le cheated out o' a first-class dinner on ye."

"Oh! they would, eh? Well, tell 'em not to git too eager fer their meat. And, by the way, what is your lunch hour down here?"

"What! ain't gittin' hungry, aire ye?"

"Waal, not exactly hungry, but my stumache is inclining slightly toward my back-bone, and it struck me that a little provender might remedy t. e difficulty."

"Haw! haw! thort ye'd git vorashious after awhile. Waal, we'll see w'at kin be did fer ye during the next twenty-four hours."

And the ruffian turned away with a chuckle, followed by the savage guard.

Charlie listened until they were out of hearing, then sat up on the edge of the rickety old cot.

"A narrow escape!" he muttered, with a smile. "I calculate I shut the pilgrim's eye up so far as the cause of the noise was concerned. Wonder if he knows of the existence of that gold? I dare say not; probably it belongs to that old hag, Ugly Ann, and she placed it in that drawer, believing it a secure hiding-place. The old Turk! If I don't fill my pockets out of that drawer, may I be kicked to death by a jack mule, as old California Bill used to say. But leaving aside the question of gold for the present, my next business is to make a break for liberty. And how am I going to do it without tools? That's the question before the debating court. How am I going to get out?"

It was a knotty question, and he spent many hours in meditation, without any definite result. Without the aid of tools, which he did not possess, he saw no way of escaping from the dungeon.

In ancient historical romances, he remembered of having read of prisoners escaping from dungeons by converting a common clasp knife into a saw, with which they would eventually work their way out through gateways of iron and barricades of rock.

Such an idea, now, seemed to him out of the question. He would wear out several knives ere he could cut out of his present dungeon.

So he sat upon the cot, and gazed about, with very little hope, upon his surroundings.

The hands of his watch pointed to the hour of six, and he judged that it must be morning in the outside world, when once more footsteps echoed in the passage outside his dungeon, and Morgan and the guard put in a second appearance.

"Oh! ye're here, are ye?" the gambler leered through the grates, as he hurled several pieces of cooked meat in upon the floor of the cell. "Didn't know but you'd take leave of us in the same mysterious manner that a brother victim did a year ago. There's some grub fer ye, so't ye ken't say I starved ye!"

"I thank you for the meat, and the delicate manner in which you served it up," Charlie replied, sarcastically. "Small favors are appreciated according to their scope. Did you have the meat well cooked?"

"Waal, I be durned ef ye ain't got a hard cheek ter ask thet! O' course et's well done, ye cuss. An'

by ther way, let me drap ye a word o' good cheer. Ye ain't a-goin' ter perigrinate fer Jordan alone, as two other passengers hev won tickets in ther lottery!"

"How do you mean?"

"Simple enough. Jem McTurk jest arrived wi' a couple o' prisoners, who're goin' ter be sacrificed along wi' ye. Their names aire, respectively, Deadwood Dick an' Clever Sam, the Celestyal."

"What! Deadwood Dick, here?"

"Exactly. Reckon thar'll be sum fun when et cum's his turn ter surrender his speerit ter ther Sun-God."

"He will not falter, you bet!" Corduroy replied, enthusiastically. "Where is my sister, you devil?"

"Oh! she's safe, but crazy as a lunatic. Bet she'd outscreech old Ann, in one o' her tantrums!"

"Curse you; and you and another have brought her to this!" the young captive gritted fiercely. "God help you, Monk Morgan, if I ever get my hands at your throat."

"Oh! I ain't afeard o' yel!" the ruffian replied, with a loud laugh.

"Put a poll-paroquet in his cage, an' all he kin do is talk and claw the bars."

And the villain turned away, followed by the guard, chuckling at his attempt to be facetious.

"So the poll-parrot is caged!" Charlie gritted, biting his lips, "but, maybe it won't be so forever. I wonder how long before they expect to sacrifice me? Evidently, Ugly Ann has not yet returned, and the interesting ceremony will be postponed until her arrival. In the meantime—"

The first thing to occupy his attention was the meat that Morgan had hurled in upon the floor. He picked it up and laid it upon the table, after which he scraped the dirt from it with his knife.

He next cut it up into small pieces and proceeded to devour it, in a ravenous manner, for his appetite was keen. It was rare done, as he liked it, and properly seasoned.

After satisfying his appetite, he stored the meat left in the drawer along with Ugly Ann's gold, taking care to replace the table-top in its customary place.

He then sat down upon the cot again and gave himself up to a study of his surroundings. Each crevice of the masonry of nature was scanned eagerly, over and over again. Some old and wise writer, whose name I now forget, says:

"Persevering watchfulness never fails to bring a discovery!"

And thus it was in Charlie's case. He had gone over the wall, perhaps, for the hundredth time, searchingly, when he noticed for the first that in places the rear walls of the dungeon had been masoned by human hands. Large blocks of stone had been put in, here and there, to fill up crevices and gaps.

The discovery gave him a joyful start.

Was there not another passageway on the opposite side of this wall? And by some effort could he not break through and escape?

Monk Morgan had spoken of the mysterious escape of a prisoner a year before.

How had he done it? Perhaps through this very masoned wall.

Over and over again Corduroy Charlie scanned the wall with an intense eagerness; but it was no use! The longer he looked the more hopeless seemed his quest, and at last he was forced to give up and sink upon the cot in sheer despair.

At noon, Morgan came and glanced in again.

"Here yet, I see!" he said, tauntingly. "Find it kinder monotonous, eh?"

"Extremely so," Charlie replied. "If I had something to read and a light to read it by, it would be a great relief."

The gambler went off with a grim "humph" and was absent a few moments, when he returned with a book and a tin candlestick, with a candle in it.

"Here's a Bible an' a candle" he said, shoving both through the grating. "Nebbe ye feel sorter

pious on account o' yer approachin' death, an' dese hayr 'll give ye cumfort."

"I am very thankful," Charlie replied, with as much cordiality of tone as he could create for the occasion; "and if I ever get a chance to repay you, I shall doubtless do so. Has Ugly Ann arrived yet?"

"No, but she is hourly expected. Her right bower, Lieutenant Cressly, has arrived, however, accompanied by his bride that is to be as soon as Deadwood Dick is dead."

"What! the faithless Leone Harris?"

"You bet! An' she's a clipper, too, or ther lieutenant wouldn't 'a' took no stock in her. Oh, no!"

And to Charlie's relief the gambler went off again, out of hearing.

Then the young prisoner laid the Bible upon the table, and took the lighted candle in his hand. It was the very thing he had been wishing for.

The torch in the passage did not reflect its illumination on the upper portion of the back wall of the dungeon, and this was the very portion that Charlie desired to examine minutely.

So taking the light in one hand and mounting the chair, he began a closer scrutiny than he had been able to make before.

He had scarcely begun when he heard footsteps, and, with an impatient exclamation, he dropped into the chair, placed the candle upon the table, and seized and opened the Bible. He was to all appearances deeply engaged in poring over the Scripture, when the new-comer paused at the grated door, but he looked up immediately afterward.

As he did so, and beheld the face peering between the grates, he uttered a startled exclamation.

"By heaven! you, Dion Avery!" he gasped, dropping the Bible and springing to his feet. "You!"

"Yes, I!" was the cool reply of the man outside. "Evidently you are surprised!"

"Yes, and no, at the same time!" the Boy Bravo replied, fiercely, nearing the door, his hands clinched until the nails cut into the flesh, and his face stern and flushed with aroused passion. "I am surprised to find you here, after you have been so successful in eluding my pursuit; but not surprised to find you connected with the devil and his minions!"

"Oh!" and there was a laconic laugh—"so you are bitter, eh? Well, I don't know as your fury affects me particularly. You are where you will never do me any harm—in fact, I have you in my power, as I am a sort of prime minister to the old hellion they call Ugly Ann."

"Curse you! I have a mind—"

"To burst from the dungeon and choke the life out of me, I dare say. Ha! ha! but that is quite out of the question. You can't get out, or you would have done so long ago."

"I don't expect to get out, luckily for you. Dion Avery. But, fear not; your day will come, as that of every dog of your ilk must come. You ruined my sister's young life—my poor, crippled sister, and thereby drove her into madness, from which she can never recover in this world. Surely God will avenge her, if I cannot!"

"Heroically spoken, my dear Madison; but, really, I cannot agree with you that our great Master will punish so very slight a misdemeanor. By the way, I was just searching out your sister's dungeon, that I might offer her my consolation. I guess I must have wandered into the wrong passage."

And with a low, malicious laugh the arch-villain turned and retraced his steps along the corridor.

Corduroy stood gazing after him until he had disappeared. He was enraged more than he remembered of ever having been before; but it did not burst into a tempest, this stirred passion of his.

Finally he turned back to the work he had left upon the approach of Dion Avery, or, as he is better known to our readers, Lieutenant Cressly.

He seized the candle, and began a careful inspection of the rear wall.

Ha! what is this? A very small thing to attract attention—yet a hope!

It was a single, almost indistinct scratch, yet a word—"Push!"

What did it mean? *Push!*

Would the wall give way, and give him liberty? Was this, at last, the avenue of escape?

CHAPTER XIV.

THE BOWELS OF AN OLD VOLCANO—PROWLERS.

THE finding of the gold in the secret compartment of a table was in one sense a pleasing discovery, but it amounted to a simple nothingness compared with the discovery made by Corduroy Charlie on the wall of the dungeon.

"Push" to him had a significance akin to liberty, and he set the candle down upon the table, with a sigh of satisfaction at having found out even this much.

"Here's where the victim escaped from, whom Monk Morgan mentioned!" he muttered, standing for a moment in doubt. "The next thing is—*did* he succeed in escaping from the mountain, or did he simply get clear of the dungeon, to find himself in another and worse prison from which there was no avenue of escape? This mountain evidently has, some day, been the home of a volcano. Where I entered was the crater, and these passages were the original flues, but have been carved and sculptured out by the Indians. In fact, the whole machinery of a volcanic mountain has been remodeled into an outlaw's retreat. What then lies beyond the secret wall? Perhaps death by starvation; but I shall make the attempt, and trust to luck. I have generally been pretty lucky."

There was no time to spare.

He must work at once, and swiftly.

The guards might return at any moment and catch him at his little game, when he would be transferred to another dungeon, from which there could be no possibility of escape.

Placing the table against the wall and the chair upon it, he mounted.

Then began the test!

Stone after stone he tried, pushing with all his concentrated strength. At last he came to the square block of granite upon which was scratched the single word, *push.*

And he did push!

Glory!—the stone yields and glides back into a recess, disclosing a dark aperture, barely sufficient to admit the passage of a human body.

A second after the block had disappeared from view it came gliding gracefully back into its original position, and the aperture was closed.

"I see!" Charlie muttered. "The business is worked with weights, or a spring, closing automatically. The next question is, how deep down is the floor on the opposite side. I haven't the least relish for dropping any great distance before stopping. Ha! the deuce!—curse the luck, anyhow!"

It was a more extravagant word than the young Bravo was in the habit of using, but his provocation was great, when he heard a scratching and rattling of the gratings on the door of his dungeon.

He wheeled around, his heart almost in his mouth—but the next moment he leaped to the floor with a joyful exclamation:

"Lily! Lily!"

For he recognized in the pale, deathly face peering through the gratings the features of his sister. But, ah! how changed in a few days—what a terrible fire shone in the eyes!

She was supported upon her crutches and her face was pressed between the bars, making it have a distorted appearance.

"Lily!" Corduroy Charlie repeated, advancing toward the door. "Lily! don't you know me?"

The deranged cripple shrunk back, as if frightened, the same wild, terrible stare in her eyes.

"Lily! don't you know me? I am Charlie, your brother!"

Her face lighted up for a moment; then she gave vent to a low, crafty laugh, and pulling a knife from the folds of her skirt, she brandished it aloft; then hobbled abruptly away in the direction she had come.

"Alas! hopelessly mad!" Charlie muttered, half-savagely, "and Dion Avery, as I know him to my cost, is responsible before God for her terrible condition. Curse him! May his torture in the future be as keen as has been poor Lily's in the past."

He could not bear to dwell upon the subject in thought, and so he turned his attention to the work he had left off.

"There's the gold—a good fortune, too—in that table," he mused, gazing at the piece of furniture, doubtfully. "I don't reckon I've got any business to touch it, fer 'tain't mine; though it would do me more good than that old hag, anyhow. Guess I'll leave it, though, until some future time."

Once more he mounted the table, candle in hand, and everything in readiness.

Assuring himself by a glance that there was no one at the door, he pushed against the block, and it glided away out of view.

The next instant he had drawn himself up into the aperture, candle in hand, and dropped out of sight in the darkness, after which the block glided back and filled the aperture.

Charlie was out of the dungeon at least.

Three days later three persons were standing in the deep pine forest that covered the declivitous mountain-side. All around them rose the grim forest monarchs, while overhead the wind sighed through the wilderness of evergreen branches.

The men were Judson Wardville, Pretzel Pete, the big-bodied proprietor of the notorious Big Schooner saloon at Quartz City, and the veteran of a thousand battles and scrimmages, Old Avalanche, the Annihilator, accompanied, as ever, by his faithful companion, Florence Night-in-a-gale.

Judson Wardville was the leader of the quartette, counting the goat. He had secured the services of Pretzel Pete and Avalanche, to assist him in his hunt for the old devil-cat, Ugly Ann, and thus far had been four days on the trail.

"Great everlastin' ham-bone thet bucked erg'in' ther constitoochin uv old Joner!" the Annihilator was saying, as he gazed into the face of his companions. "I reckon we've lost ther trail ag'in, in spite uv ther Old Harry. Thes yere mountainar' as full o' footpaths as my Florence's skull-plate aire full o' veins an' arteries. Fact, by gracious!"

Judson Wardville gave vent to an impatient exclamation.

"Then the old hag has certainly eluded us, and escaped to the mountain-top, where, you say, is located the Temple of the Sun-God and all her barbarian forces?" he said, interrogatively.

"Waal, now, I reckon thet's about ther grand status uv ther matter. We've tuk ther wrong trail, whar we orter hev took ther right, an' thet's w'at's ther matter with our skientific engineering. Probably ther old ripscallion hes escaped, an' will be cavortin' down on us wi' a gang o' her 'T'rtars!"

"Shimminy gracious unt my vife Katrina!" ejaculated Pretzel Pete, with an alarmed glance around. "Den I dink ash how I goes pack mit my Pig Schooner immediately. I vas never mit sech a guntry in der 'hole of mine life, so helb me."

"Haw! haw! Old Moses o' bull-rush peregrinations! ye ain't actooally gittin' skeer'd, Dutchy? Lordy! thar's my goat Florence, and my late mare, Prudence Cordeliar! hooray! they nevyer got skeered, not they. 'Twarn't their grain o' timber. Thar's Florence alone who has held his own ag'in' er milyun Injuns, an' entranced 'em by ther simple magnetism o' ther eye. Great ham-bone! don't be afoard, Dutchy! no one'd hurt you!"

"I scarcely know which way to move now," Judson Wardville said gloomily. "What is your opinion, Avalanche? I do not want to give up until I

have got possession of the old she-devil, Ugly Ann. As I have told you before, I believe that the two waifs who came to Quartz City—Corduroy Charlie and his crippled sister—a week ago are my long-lost children. We have obtained sufficient evidence to convince us that both have been captured by and are in the possession of Ugly Ann. Shall we turn back and leave them to perish or shall we go on and work faithfully until we are able to rescue them from the confinement, which is but a foretaste of a horrible death?"

"Great ham-bone! we'll go on!" replied Avalanche.

"Shimminy gracious unt my wife Katrina! ve go on mit der hill up!" vociferated Pretzel Pete, stirred into a state of enthusiasm. "Ve lick sevendeen kinds of plue plazes oud of der enemy, so helb me! Only I wish I had swi glass lager, unt I veel ash if I lick der hull army."

"Thet's right, Germany! Ster up yer animation, put yer right fut for'a'd, an' march. Shoulder arms, all hands, and form in battle array—an' away we go!"

It was with some misgivings as to his personal safety that Corduroy Charlie let go the ledge and dropped into the darkness beyond the dungeon. He knew not but what he would fetch up in some awful depth, a crushed and bleeding piece of humanity. But most any condition he considered better than the fate that would be his should he be sacrificed by the barbarous Indians, who controlled the mountain fastness.

Down—down he went, for perhaps his length, then struck upon a hard rocky footing. In his descent his candle had gone out, but luckily he had a few matches left, and soon had a light.

On flaring the light about, he found that he was in a narrow, low, and rugged passage, which seemed to grow more contracted the further it advanced.

Before tracing it, Charlie concluded to examine the machinery which worked the trap stone. He found that it was managed by a skillful and ingenious arrangement of pulleys and pivots; also that he could ascend upon the projections of rock, and pull back the block and re-enter the dungeon at his own pleasure, by a very little exertion.

This was a welcome discovery, as he might be able to work his escape by it, into another part of the crater.

After satisfying himself concerning the mechanism of the sliding block, he turned, and with the candle held above his head, began to thread the rugged flue, which had not been chiseled out by Indian sculptors, but burned in the depths of the rock by some ancient volcanic fire.

"What a place this would be for a robber den!" the young Bravo muttered, as he moved along. "It isn't much else, as it is. I wonder which direction of the compass I am moving, anyhow? South, I should guess. If I don't find a way out directly, my candle will burn out, and then I shall be in a deuce of a fix. Hello!"

He tripped and nearly fell over some object which lay in his path.

Stepping back a pace, he lowered his light to examine it. As he did so, he gave vent to an ejaculation of horror.

Before him lay the bones of a human skeleton, looking ghastly enough as revealed by the candle-light.

"Jerusalem!" was Charlie's first expression, in words. "I reckon this is a cemetery instead of an avenue of escape. I wonder who these bones originally belonged to?"

As he spoke, a long, squirming object crept out of the skeleton, and darted away into a crevice.

With a shudder, the young Bravo stepped over the ghastly object, and continued on through the passage.

The air was damp and foul smelling, and difficult to breathe; but, with a firm resolution, Charlie kept

on. He was resolved not to give up while he had strength to move.

His candle burned lower and lower.

There was no draught through the passage, which wound on with the sinuosity of a serpent and the zig-zag irregularity of a flash of lightning.

And this fact seemed to argue that the passage had no adjacent outlet into the outside world.

Snakes and creeping vermin were to be seen in plenty along the route, where the floor of the passage was covered with water.

"I wish I could bid this mountain resume its fiery eruption," Charlie muttered. "Wouldn't there be some frightened red niggers up above! Guess I'd be apt to catch the worst part of the fun, though."

After tramping along for perhaps an hour, he paused where a large boulder offered a place for a seat.

"I guess I may as well sit down here and rest, as long as I've got plenty of spare time, for I'm pretty well fagged out. Six P. M., eh?" with a glance at the face of his watch. "Guess I'll eat the remainder of my venison, then take a nap. I feel as if I could sleep a dog's age away!"

He produced what meat he had left from his first meal in the dungeon, and began to devour it ravenously.

"I wonder if they have discovered my escape from the dungeon yet," he muttered, between his mouthfuls. "If they have, there'll be more war in the camp. They'll see the chair upon the table close to the wall. Will that lead them to examine the stones, and will they discover this passage? If so, I reckon I'll hear from them after a while. I don't know as I shall incur any danger by lying down, as I'm easy to waken."

After finishing the venison to the last scrap, he felt somewhat relieved, and prepared to sleep. Blowing out the candle, he stretched himself out in as comfortable a position as possible, and closed his eyes.

But for a long time no slumber came as a relief to his weariness. His mind was too active.

His thoughts went first with pity to his sister, and then with hatred to him who called himself Dion Avery. Then they reverted far away to Quartz City, and then to dashing, pretty Lena Vernon, and a pleased flush came to his cheek, and a strange sensation thrilled his heart.

"That girl's a trump!" he muttered, half-dreamingly, "and from what little I saw of her, I like her. If I were ever to choose a wife, it would be such a vivacious creature as she. But, hal hal the idea of my thinking of a wife, when here's grim death grinning at me maliciously. Sleep and escape are the first two considerations before thinking of matrimony."

He finally fell asleep, and it was such a sleep as he had seldom known before—a complete oblivion.

For hours he slumbered on peacefully, and in his dreams he saw bright visions of Lena Vernon, or "Buster."

And while he was thus sleeping, without a thought of danger, footsteps echoed along the passage; then the light of a bull's-eye lantern shot with mellow radiance between the rugged walls, and streamed upon the face of the sleeper.

"Come erlong, feller-citizens!" cried a voice; "here he is now!"

And several men crowded up around the young Bravo.

Who were they—friends or foes?

CHAPTER XV.

DOOM PRONOUNCED—BAD MEDICINE KEEPS HIS OATH.

"GRAB him, b'yees, afore he wakes up, or thar'll be cause for several funerals, fer he's a double-bar'led leetle episode, w'en ye don't take him at fault!"

The command was quickly obeyed, and the first that Corduroy Charlie knew of his situation, he was bound hand and foot, and the band of evil-faced

ruffians bending over him. For it was Jem McTurk and Monk Morgan, and their "peace commissioners," who had surprised him while he lay asleep.

It was a vexatious discovery to him, but he concealed his real feelings under a mask of cool indifference.

"So, you've got me again, eh?" he observed, calmly, gazing up into the ruffians' faces; "and I suppose you calculate you've scored a victory."

"Waal, we do reckon we've did sumthin' o' thet sort!" replied McTurk, with a leer. "I reckon we nevyer do things by halves nor three-quarters, an' consekently, we ginerally get in on ther hum-stretch in good shape."

And all the toughs laughed at the bullwhacker's attempted logic.

He was looking even more repulsive than ever before, for his forehead was bruised, and black and blue, from the battle with Florence the goat, and one eye was closed effectually, for "repairs."

"How did you come to find the passage?" Charlie questioned.

"Oh! thet war easy ernuff, from ther posish in w'ich ye left ther chair on ther table. We s'arched ther wall, an' found ther word 'Push,' an' as a natteral consekence we pushed, you bet, and hayr we aire. Reckon ye warn't loo in' for us, war ye?"

"No, I can't say as I was exactly expecting you, or I shouldn't have yielded to Morpheus so easily."

"Haw, haw!—it's just as wall that ye did, for ye kedn't never hev got out by this route. Mebbe ye stumbled over a skeleton back hayr, a piece? Waal, that war ther framework uv a human o' yer sex who tried this yere avenoo of escape over a year ago! Ye see how he succeeded. I 'pect ye're willin' ter go back ter ther dungeon, eh?"

"Certainly!" Charlie replied, sarcastically. "I am not that hard-hearted that I could refuse your magnificent accommodations for guests."

There was a general chuckle among the ruffians, and Charlie was raised to his feet and the thongs cut away.

He was then forced along the passage, between the captors, back toward the dungeon from which he had studied so long and patiently to make his escape.

Half an hour later, the whole party were in the dungeon.

"Hayr ye aire, my posey!" McTurk said, with a diabolical grin. "Boys, tie his feet again, and lay him on that cot. We ken't hev any more o' these runaway escapades—not much. Hol ho! thar ye aire, Mr. Corduroy Charlie, an' ye'll stay thar till old Ugly Ann gits ready to cook yer goose. Oh! ye needn't look cold at me. I don't forgit ye, nor ther leetle holes ye perforated in my sides; nor I don't luv ye overmuch nuther, I reckon."

"Either your love or hate amounts to very little, in my estimation, you devil!" Charlie replied.

"Oh! you'll see, when ye git sacrificed, me lad. Let me announce that ther first act in ther cumin' program will be a leetle blood-lettin' for pastime."

Then, with horrible laughs, the ruffians left the dungeon, locking the door securely behind them.

Corduroy Charlie was left bound and helpless upon the cot, to reflect upon his approaching fate.

He was well aware that he was beyond helping himself now, and that if something extraordinary should not happen, he would soon be consigned to the merciless Indian worshippers for torture.

By following winding passages and ascending flights of stone steps, the principal chamber of old Ugly Ann's quarters was reached from Charlie's cell. It was a large cavernous apartment in the heart of the mountain, with lofty ceilings from which pended stalactites of grotesque shape. The floor had been chiseled off to a smoothness of polished marble, and in the center was a raised dais of stone, surmounted by a stone chair, similar to the one on the mountain top.

Here Ugly Ann was seated, attired in a flowing

robe of bearskin, with the fur side out, and with a strangely-shaped palm-leaf hat upon her head. She probably intended to represent an enthroned queen, but it was rather an amusing picture.

Upon each side of her throne were four stone posts, with a bowl chiseled in the top of each, where burned fat fires, which gave a weird illumination to the scene; also, on each side of the throne, four savages in hideous war-paint stood guard, with long lances, looking like so many bronzed statues.

Otherwise, the great chamber was deserted, and the least sound caused a weirdly detonating echo.

For a long time Ugly Ann sat in silence, her wild eyes fixed upon space, with a vacant stare. She seemed to be buried in a deep oblivion.

At last, however, the muscles in her face began to twitch, and her eyes assumed an expression in which were cunning, malicious intent, and triumph, blended.

"Ha! ha! what a feast for the Sun-God, Quoloro—what a precious offering to his majesty! And, at the same time, while I am striking for his pleasure, I am inflicting torture upon my enemies. Hol ho! ho! how much would Judson Wardville not give to get possession of his children, who have been under my watchful eye since they were mere babes! Ah! I'd give all my gold to have him here, so that he could see me torture them. But I have him not, and cannot well adjourn the sacrifice. Already my warriors have waited past the usual day, and are growing impatient. Let me see—the boy, Corduroy Charlie shall go first. I am eager to torture him, because of his attempt to escape. Then the cripple shall follow suit, and next the Chinaman and the road-agent, Deadwood Dick. Hol ho! he will be my best victim, and I shall enjoy his torture."

"Cressly says I shall not have the road-agent's red-haired wife to torture, and he must be obeyed, for he hath served me faithfully. The red-haired wife of Deadwood Dick shall not die!"

As she ceased speaking, the old hag gazed around her sharply; then seizing a horn which hung at her side, she blew a shrill blast—the trumpeter's call.

A few moments later there was an answering blast in the distance, and then through a broad archway in a distant corner of the room, filed three abreast, a motley gang of fierce-looking red-men, horribly bedaubed with paint, and attired in the regalia of the war-path. They were armed either with spears or rifles, and presented an imposing appearance.

In the lead was a tall, brawny man, whom, by his beard, which sweeps below his mask, the reader may have no difficulty in recognizing as Silver Beard.

Just in his rear, and between him and the warriors of the Sun-God, Jem McTurk and his rough associates fill in the line.

And thus the whole band, numbering in the neighborhood of three-score, marched up and came to a halt in front of Ugly Ann's throne.

As they came to a halt, the hag arose and waved her hand, and all except Silver Beard dropped upon bended knee and bowed their heads.

"Silver Beard, I am pleased with the turnout. But where is your *cide*, Lieutenant Cressly?"

"I know not, your grace. He was not in the assembly-room when you signaled, and I took no pains to hunt for him!" was the reply.

"That is where thou didst wrong. But let that pass. Is all in readiness, so that the sacrifice—the glorious offering to Quoloro, may take place on the morrow?"

"I believe so, according to the report of the guards."

"Very well. At sunrise to-morrow you will hear my call. Then assemble your command and the prisoners before me here, for the ceremonies. Let not a man be absent, for this shall be a great occasion, when Quoloro shall smile benignly down upon his worshippers. Have you the beasts in the pit in readiness?"

"Quite ready!" Silver Beard replied, with a little shiver. "The two cinnamon bears have been excited by the taste of warm blood, and the same with the bloodhounds and the three wolves, which have not been fed to any amount for a week!"

"Good! The sport on the morrow shall be exciting. Remember, every man to be present on my call. You may now retire!"

Silver Beard bowed, and then turned away without a word. The kneeling subjects of the Mountain Queen then arose and marched after him, until the council-chamber was again deserted except by the hag and her body-guard.

Alas! the morrow had an ill-look for the prisoners in the volcanic retreat.

In a cell, several passages distant from that occupied by Corduroy Charlie, Deadwood Dick paced to and fro, with manifest impatience. His brow was clouded, and his hands clinched tightly together, while his lips were compressed firmly.

Jem McTurk had just passed the door of the dungeon, and hurled in the unwelcome announcement that the morrow was to be the day for the prisoners to die.

But it was not this news which caused Deadwood Dick's emotion. He had faced death a hundred times, and in a score of shapes before; he scarcely gave a thought upon its terrors now.

What were gall and wormwood to him now were the thoughts that he was doomed to leave behind him a faithless wife.

"I swore that she should die, but yet have not kept my oath!" he gritted, fiercely. "Would that God would see fit to punish her faithlessness, ere I am sent off—it would make my trip pleasanter. Poor little Dick! how thankful I am that he never lived to feel the tainted sting of a mother's shame and dishonor. He is an angel now!"

"Hal hal and there is where you will be before long!" cried a mocking voice. "You are nearly a saint on earth as it is!"

Deadwood Dick wheeled about with a smothered curse.

Leone Harris stood outside the grated door, smiling like a fiend.

"You!" the imprisoned Prince of the Road exclaimed—"you!—faithless, shameless viper!"

"Exactly—I!" the girl-woman replied, triumphantly—"I who am the means of your unpleasant incarceration, Edward. I learned that you proposed to kill me, and so I took the precaution to cage you!"

"Curses on you! From a woman you have turned to a she-devil!"

"Perhaps you are right. The devil tempted me, and like mother Eve, I yielded."

"And you intend to allow these barbarians to butcher me, Leone?"

"I am powerless to help myself. Ugly Ann, even, would like me for a victim, but my gracious Cressly prevents her."

"Leone!"—and here the road-agent's voice was hoarse and choked—"Leone, turn back from this shameful life—come back to me! 'Tis not yet too late, when I will open my arms to receive you!"

"No, Ned Harris; you ask in vain. I have fallen down a precipice, and have not the strength or inclination to turn back. You are doomed, and must meet your fate without expecting pity from me."

"Pity from you!" Deadwood Dick murmured, as she turned away—"no! I will not expect it. Your heart is turned to stone!"

In still another cell was confined the Chinaman, Clever Sam. After all, it had not benefited him to break faith with his master, Corduroy Charlie, for when Ugly Ann had pointed him out as a victim, the ruffians forgot his service in their behalf, and poor Samuel was doomed to lie in captivity.

He said very little—kept silent, and was moody. He had been allowed a pipe and tobacco, and consequently spent most of his time in smoking.

About night of this same day of the last narrated occurrence, Clever Sam was engaged as usual at his pipe, when his ear detected a stealthy footstep coming along the passage, and in a moment a brawny form paused in front of the grated door.

The Celestial gave a violent start, for he recognized no less a personage than his former brother-servant, the redoubtable Bad Medicine.

"Yah! he! he! hi! hi!" Clever Sam cried, joyfully. "Redee skinee muchee goodee Injun—comee muchee to lettee out Chinee man. Muchee fince redee skinee, allee samee!"

"Wagh!" Bad Medicine replied, grimly, as he fingered the fastenings of the door. "Pig-Tail man no good. He like de prairie dog an' de coyote. He attack his foes at a weak point, but run when dey grow strong. He help white dogs steal away de Lily, and Bad Medicine come for his scalp. Ugh! much big skulp, ha! ha!"

"Whatee? goodee Injun no takee poor Chinee man scalpee!" Clever Sam yelled, sinking back in horror. "Chinee man den no go back to Chinee."

"You go to happy hunting-grounds, you dog of a pale-face!" was the grim response; then the fastenings gave way, the door was flung open, and the red-skin sprung into the dungeon, knife in hand. There was a fierce, revengeful fire in his eye, and a grimness in the expression of his features that were terrible.

He sprung upon the cowering traitor, and there was a sharp, deadly struggle; then—

But we pass by without giving the sickening details. Enough to say, that soon the Celestial lay upon the floor dead and scalpsless, while Bad Medicine turned and left the cell with his terrible trophy swung to his belt. He had given his word to Corduroy Charlie, and with the result the reader has seen, he has kept it.

CHAPTER XVI.

THE SACRIFICE—CONCLUSION.

WHILE Deadwood Dick and Corduroy Charlie were languishing in their respective prisons, awaiting the sunrise of the morrow, which was to be the signal of their doom, and which was but a few hours away, another scene was transpiring which it will be necessary to chronicle before we merge into the curtain act of our drama of Western life.

Into a volcanic cavern of the wonderful mountain we would take the reader. It is not so large as the council-chamber of the Mountain Queen, but is withal an apartment of considerable size. Through a crevice at one side leaps a sheet of flame, sufficient to brilliantly illuminate the scene, and at the same time emit a steady heat.

Originally there was but a vein of gas from the bowels of the mountain; but once a spark of fire came in contact, and the flame burst forth never to be quenched by mortal power.

The rocky floor was covered with mats of furbearing skins, and a rude couch was upholstered with the same material. The rest of the furniture consisted of a few ill made chairs and a table, upon which was a decanter of liquor, and a long-tubed Turkish pipe.

Seated in a chair by the table, with his feet elevated upon the back of a second chair, was Lieutenant Cressly.

He was occupied in drawing dense clouds of smoke from the pipe, and in watching the woman who was half-reclining upon the rugs, a couple of paces away. She was attired in a loosely-fitting wrapper, which showed off the shape of her form to advantage, and was none other than Leone, the wife of Deadwood Dick.

As she lay there, her attention was divided between

a glass of spirits in one hand and a paper which lay within eyeshot.

The lieutenant gazed at her sharply, a half-frown upon his brow.

"It appears to me that you have got more of an eye for that paper than for me!" he growled at last, giving an extra puff to his pipe. "I didn't bring you here to amuse yourself, but to cater to my whims."

"Oh! is that possible?" was the sarcastic reply. "Well, what would you have of me now?"

"Nothing in particular, only please stop reading, and devote your time to entertaining me. It annoys me to see you look at anything or anybody but myself."

"Indeed! You are the most selfish mortal I ever met. I don't know as I am particularly your slave, Lieutenant Cressly."

"And why not, pray?"

"And why, pray? I'm in no way bound to you, except that you have chosen to protect me."

"Humph! One would say that your infatuation for me was on the decline since a short month ago."

"Well, perhaps it is," was the reply, with a cool laugh. "I have in a measure grown tired of you, and have been contemplating a change of base. You are so different from most men. Deadwood Dick was never jealous of me."

"Hang Deadwood Dick! And you shall not leave me. I will kill you first!"

"Ha! ha! let me have a hand in that, Dion Avery!" cried a shrill, peculiar voice, the sound of which caused a shudder of horror to creep over the villainous lieutenant. "Let me do what slaughtering is to be done!"

And there in the arched entrance of the room, Lily Madison strode into view, leaning upon her crutches, and at the same time holding a pair of leveled revolvers in her grasp.

Cressly, *alias* Dion Avery, muttered a savage oath when he beheld the girl; then reached for a revolver in his belt.

But it was not there.

And just then the cripple laughed wildly, as she hobbled further into the room.

"Ha! ha! Dion Avery, you have no weapons; you left them in another room. I was watching and saw you, else I should not have ventured here. You are both literally weaponless and in my power. Ha! ha!"

"Curses on you, girl! Leave the room, or I'll—" and the lieutenant arose with a threatening gesture. But he did not advance in the face of the pair of steel tubes that were leveled at his heart.

"Hold up, you wretch!" the cripple said, deliberately. "Don't be rash, but listen to me. They say I am insane, crazy, *mad*! Perhaps I am, at times; but I am sane enough now to know that I have come here for a purpose. I escaped from my cell some time ago, since when I have been hiding around watching you—you, Dion Avery, who came to my home in Stockton, and lured a poor cripple girl away from maiden honor—intimidated her when she was alone and unable to defend herself. Ah! you inhuman monster, I never forgot nor forgave you, and I roused my brother to follow you. I came too! I was mad—mad—*mad*! but still knew that I was coming to avenge my wrongs. At last the hour of my vengeance has come! Ha! ha! Kneel down, you wretch, and beg my forgiveness, but that will not suffice; I must have your life!"

"Great God! you would not commit murder, girl?" Avery gasped, blanching white, and trembling like an aspen.

"No! it is not murder to avenge one's wrongs like mine. Prepare to die, for I am ready to be your executioner. I am a dead shot, thanks to the training my brother gave me. I shall not miss you; nor your other victim, that faithless wife. I know her—Deadwood Dick, her husband, told me of her. She shall die, too. Ha! ha! yes, die as she would have her husband die! You need not beg; 'tis use-

less, for my decision cannot be altered. I will count fifty—*then, you both die!*"

She spoke calmly, yet sternly, as if every word was meant.

She began counting aloud, in a slow, deliberate way.

In terror Dion Avery dropped upon his knees, and began to plead and beg. Leone stood with pale, averted face, and trembled.

"Forty-eight, *forty-nine!* FIFTY!"

There were then five reports within as many seconds; then three figures lay upon the floor—*dead!*

They were Dion Avery, Leone Harris, and poor Lily Madison!

Poor Lily!

She had found her vengeance, and ended her own misery with the same deadly instrument which took the lives of the two beings, who each had played an unholy part in the great Life Drama.

The morning dawned in the outer world, but within the cavernous recesses of the mountain no light of day ever penetrated. Nevertheless Ugly Ann was upon her throne at the hour of sunrise, attired in a flowing robe of furry skins, and looking as savage as some wild beast of prey instead of a human being.

"'Tis the hour of my triumph!" she muttered, with a gleeful chuckle, which seemed almost fiendish; "the time when I can hear my inferiors beg and pray me to cease my persecutions. Ha! ha! I am then the Queen, and have the power. But, 'tis time! I will blow my call, and summon the hosts before me!"

She blew a shrill blast upon the horn, which served her as a call.

In answer, a savage entered the council-chamber, and bowed on bended knee before the throne of the mountain queen.

"Ah! is it you, Benito? Why do you come alone?" was the eager demand of the hag. "Where are Silver Beard and all the others?"

"They will be here soon your majesty!" was the reply, in English, too clear to come from other than a white man—which the page was, in disguise. "I was sent to announce their coming."

And, as he spoke, a long procession filed into the chamber; the same as had responded to the queen's call the day previous, with the exception of seven or eight more savages, and the prisoners, who headed the procession, marching at the points of spears, in the hands of McTurk and his gang.

But there were only two prisoners—Corduroy Charlie and Deadwood Dick, the road-agent.

"Ha! what means *this*?" Ugly Ann demanded, fiercely, as she glanced upon each face in the crowd. "You, Silver Beard? where is your *Aide*, again, and the red-haired girl, and the cripple, and the Chinaman? Where? Speak!"

"They're all four dead, your majesty!"

"What! dare you tell me this—all dead? By heaven! explain before I—"

"Be calm, queen and you shall know all. Lieutenant Cressly we just found in his section of the caverns, lying upon the floor—dead: as was his red-haired companion and the crippled girl. All three had been shot through the heart."

"Oh, heaven!" Corduroy Charlie groaned, staggering back, while tears started from his eyes. "My poor sister dead, and in this den! Would to God I'd never seen this country at all!"

"Don't take it hard, partner!" Deadwood Dick replied, huskily, "for she is now out of her misery. I, too, have lost one by this blow, but, God forgive me, I mourn not her loss."

"Curses on the luck! what of the Chinaman, Silver Beard?" Ugly Ann cried.

"We found him dead and scalpless, too, in his cell. Doubtless it was all the work of the crazy cripple, as she was armed, and at liberty. After

wreaking vengeance she probably ended her life by suicide."

"But, how did she escape from the cavern?"

"That I am unable to tell you. The door was found still fastened. There must be some other secret, as in the dungeon where Corduroy Charlie was confined."

"Ay! so there must!" Ugly Ann replied, fiercely. "It must be looked to later; but, now, other business demands our attention. The sacrifice to Quoloro must take place immediately. Let Corduroy Charlie first be led forward."

The order was obeyed, and the young Bravo was led in front of the mountain hag, who regarded him with a keen, scrutinizing glance.

"Young man, you have been chosen as a victim of sacrifice to Quoloro, the great Sun-God. Around me you behold his worshipers, whose numbers are multiplying each year. They demand that a life each quarter be sacrificed to their supreme king, in payment for all the past favors he has shown them. So largely has he favored them of late, that I have resolved to sacrifice as many victims as possible. Therefore, you shall go first. You and your cripple sister have ever been in under my watchful eye, ripening for this sacrifice. I would not have you longer left in doubt concerning your birth—you were the children of Judson and Madge Wardville. Your own father it was whom you rescued from me, a few night since!"

"Great Heaven! can this be true? You are lying to me, woman!" Corduroy Charlie cried.

"Ha! ha! no, I am not lying; but you shall never see your father. It is my revenge upon him. Ha! ha! sweet revenge. Years ago, when I cast my love and wealth at his feet, he refused me—refused me, as if I were some scorpion, instead of a reigning belle. After that, I lived only for revenge. I stole away his babes when he was married three years, and he never saw them again. I early indentured you to Joel Madison, a wealthy trapper, with whom you remained until his death. And all this while I have been treasuring up revenge. Ha! ha! ha!"

"But, I must not tarry for narration of the past. The delights of this torture-hour are too great to be put aside. Young man, here is your programme: First, you shall bleed half an ounce of crimson from each arm, and then, blindfolded, you will be cast into a den of savage beasts, among which will be unfed bears, wolves, and bloodhounds. Here you will be given the freedom of your limbs, and a knife to defend yourself with. Here you will be left for two hours; then a guard will be sent to gather up your bones, which will be burned before this throne, and the ashes used for scrubbing purposes. Silver Beard! you will step forward and perform your part!"

A dreadful silence pervaded the cavern! The old hag wore a gloating expression of features.

Charlie Madison stood in the vise-like grasp of half a score of painted savages, his face pale, but a flash of brave determination in his eyes.

No matter how great the pain, he was resolved not to betray his fear, if any should arise.

His arms were held out partly, and bared to the shoulder.

Silver Beard then stepped forward, and with a hand which trembled, punctured the skin above the elbow in each arm, with a razor-pointed knife. Immediately the crimson began to flow in little streams, and small glass cups were held to catch the blood.

At first, a shudder and a sickening sensation went over Charlie, but he bit his lips fiercely and kept it off.

It took but a few seconds to fill the tiny vessels; then salt was forced into the punctures to prevent the flow of blood. The young Bravo was a trifle whiter and somewhat dizzy as this part of his torture was concluded, but he did not betray much emotion.

"Ha! ha! You stood your part of the torture so far, well!" Ugly Ann, ejaculated, with ill-concealed

disappointment, that she had not been able to catch a groan or even a sound. "But wait until you are cast into the den—that will test your iron nerve. Away with him, Silver Beard, and feed him to the brutes; then come quickly back, for there is other work for you to do."

The prime minister obeyed, with a courteous bow, by heading the savages who bore Corduroy Charlie out of the council-chamber.

Through long, dank passages they then up flight after flight of stone steps, he of solid rock, until finally they emerged in a temple on the mountain top.

From here they crossed toward the massive stone wall which Charlie had noticed when he first had been brought to the volcanic prison. By stone-steps they ascended to the top of this wall, which was wide enough to admit of three standing abreast.

Then it was that Charlie knew what chances he had for life.

Below him lay a pit, quarried out to the depth of thirty feet, with the smooth, unscalable wall all around it, making the pit a prison from which there was no possible chance of escape.

Just within the pit were stout pens, in which were contained two cinnamon bears, a pair of wolves and a pair of bloodhounds, all of which seemed to give a delighted howl as they beheld their victim come upon the parapet.

"Let loose the animals!" Silver Beard commanded. "and then retire to your queen; I will follow!"

Then the doors of the kennel-pens were lifted by means of an arrangement of ropes, and the animals plunged out into the arena of the pit.

Immediately a wide sash was wound repeatedly around Charlie's face, and tied behind his head; then he was seized and dropped into the pit, and a knife hurled after him.

He struck the ground with a force that almost stunned him, but he quickly recovered himself, and reaching into his bootleg, he drew his own trusty knife. He heard a series of low, wrangling cries, and a patter of feet, and knew that the animals were rushing toward him. In a moment they would be on his person, tearing at his flesh.

He shuddered at the thought, and inserting the blade of his knife alongside his face he cut away the bandage with a powerful stroke, and it dropped to the ground.

Just in time! A glance discovered a huge cinnamon rushing down almost upon him, followed by the snarling wolves and yelping hounds. With a cry, he leaped aside, and ran swiftly to the opposite side of the pit. The bear followed with a savage growl. Charlie paused a moment, and glanced toward the heavens. He gave a sigh of relief at one thing. None of his persecutors were in sight to mock at him in his peril.

The bear and his companions were approaching closer—something must be done. Charlie was well satisfied that he could not kill the bear with his small revolver, and therefore his knife must do the work. Nearer came the huge brute, reared upon its hind legs, its mouth open and tongue lolling out, and forward paws extended. Then Charlie sprang aside quickly, and struck the bear a terrible blow with the knife in the back of the neck. The following instant, however, he was fiercely set upon by the wolves and bloodhounds.

They leaped upon him and bit him, and clawed open his clothing and flesh furiously.

The blood began to spurt in a score of places, and though he fought with desperate determination, he began to see that his hopes were futile. He grew faint and weak and dizzy—he lost the power of sight—his already weakened arms refused longer to do service—he staggered and fell—there was a vague pandemonium of wild sounds in his ears then he fainted.

In the cavernous chamber of Ugly Ann, other events were transpiring which we must chronicle.

Eagerly the old hag waited for the return of Silver Beard with the warriors, for she was hoping to extract shrieks and groans from Deadwood Dick, when he came to lose his sacrificial blood. But she knew not the young man as well as the world of the Black Hills country knew him; he had lost blood on more than one occasion without wincing—he had plenty more to spare.

After a lapse of ten minutes the Prime Minister returned with his guard.

"Ha! Silver Beard, did you cast the victim into the den?" the hag demanded, with fierce eagerness.

"Yes, your majesty!"

"Good! ere this, his bones are stripped of their flesh. Bring forward the next victim."

Deadwood Dick was led forward, but there was no trace of fear, or hesitation upon his calm, cynical countenance, as he faced his torturers.

At a motion from Ugly Ann his arms were bared and punctured by the sharp knife of Silver Beard, until the blood began to flow into the tiny glass receptacles.

Not a muscle in the road-agent's composition moved to betray that he was experiencing pain. He stood like a statue, a grim, half-sarcastic expression upon his face, that worked upon the passions of Ugly Ann as oil does upon a bed of live coals.

"Halt! this butchery has gone far enough. Surrender, every dog, or you die as only dogs are fit to die!"

Clear and distinct the words echoed through the council-chamber in detonating reverberations.

The savages started and glared about in alarm—Ugly Ann rose upon her throne with a frenzied curse.

"Great conqurorious ham-bone thet bu'sted ther barricades uv old Joner! surrender, ye red hellions, or we'll di combobberate yer yearthly views o' ther great hereafter!"

"Yaw! yaw! surrender, or ve shoot you ober mit our guns, so helb me! Shimminy gracious unt my wife Katrina! vat a crowd i h dis!"

In an instant all was confusion—there were fierce yells from Ugly Ann and her savages—roaring reports and flashes of firearms—a struggle, a battle in the smoke that enveloped the room in a cloud.

Then came a silence, which was at length broken, as the smoke rose above the scene.

"Hurra! Great boreal destructive ham-bone thet war ther takin' off eppydemic uv old Joner! We've killed every durned galoot, red niggers, ther white niggers, an' all—fac', by gracious! Everywhar hes a wave o' teetotal annihilation swept like ther rantankerous simoon o' Sarab's Deserts. Cum for'a'd, b'yees, an' view ther 'reck."

"Is the devil-woman dead?" cried Judson Wardville, pushing forward among a crowd of masked men who swarmed in the rear of Old Avalanche.

"Yas, deader than ary old spider thet an elerfant stepped on. Thar's nary a thing but maccademized stiffs layin' all around us—fac', by gracious!"

"Yes! there is one who isn't dead!" cried a ringing voice; and up from among the dead bodies that were strewn around rose a form. "*Deadwood Dick still lives!*"

A cheer went up from three-score of throats, a welcome to the chief from his followers, who had come to his rescue, and, in company with Judson Wardville's party, had found an entrance to the mysterious mountain honeycomb from the mountain-side.

"But my son—Corduroy Charlie—where is he?" Wardville cried, rushing about among the bodies, and searching for the face he had grown to love. "Where is he?"

"Alas! the young man you name has been consigned to the beast-pit, sir!" Deadwood Dick replied, sadly. "You arrived a little too late to save him."

"But others were not too late to save him, gentlemen!" cried a voice, and *Lena Vernon and Bad Medicine entered the cavern, bearing between them the*

mangled form of Corduroy Charlie. "Cheer up, Mr. Wardville, for your son still lives!"

There was a cheer then in good earnest, and ready hands set to work in dressing the wounds and restoring Corduroy Charlie back to consciousness.

"Buster" consented to relate how she had joined with the noble Indian, Bad Medicine, in his search for his young master—how they had reached the mountain-top and slain the guards of the temple; then exchanged places with them, while Bad Medicine had entered the caverns to kill Clever Sam—how they had seen Corduroy Charlie cast into the pit, and how they had at the last moment succeeded in rescuing him from being torn to pieces, by shooting the animals.

This and much more, which space forbids us to relate.

Corduroy Charlie, though torn and lacerated in nearly every portion of his body, except his face, was not fatally injured, and was soon recovered enough to be reunited to his long-lost father, and to thank and receive the congratulations from all his friends. But he was very weak and sore, and it was determined by all to remain a few days in the mountain caverns.

All the bodies were removed to another section, where they were left in their final tomb, among them being the hag Ugly Ann, Silver Beard (whom Judson Wardville recognized as her own brother), Jem McTurk, Monk Morgan, and his associates.

Later the bodies of poor Lily Madison, the unfaithful Leone Harris, and Dion Avery, *alias* Vernon, were brought into the council-chamber, and a solemn and impressive funeral service offered over the remains by Deadwood Dick, who was capable of turning a ready hand to most anything.

Then, the bodies were laid away, for their final rest in the dungeons that had lately contained the prisoners of sacrifice.

Later still they all returned to Quartz City, where Corduroy Charlie was presented to his new-found mother, and there was a joyful reunion.

Old Ugly Ann's gold had been fetched from the cavern, and all voted that it was rightly Charlie's.

Avalanche, Pretzel Pete, Leona Vernon and Deadwood Dick (disguised), were all present at the reunion, which was a joyous one, although the recent losses by death to five of the party, prevented any jollity; it was more of a scene of congratulation to the parents, who fervently thanked God that they were permitted to be restored to even one of their lost children.

After bidding them all his best wishes for the future, Deadwood Dick took his departure.

A little yet in closing, and I am through.

The Wardvilles, re yet in the Black Hills country, but in a section where the pioneer is fast settling and improving, what will some day be a charming country of homes. Here the father and son are negotiating for a tract, which they mean to make as beautiful as any home can be made by a liberal expenditure of wealth.

Lena Vernon is with them, and at no distant day there will probably be a Mrs. Charlie Wardville.

Bad Medicine still lives with Charlie, whom he seems to love in his wild, untutored way.

Pretzel Pete is in Quartz City.

Old Avalanche and his eccentric goat may be found in 'most any excitement where "varmints require annihilatin'."

Of Deadwood Dick I have no data at hand. He has disappeared from the scenes of his late operations, and perhaps retired from Western life altogether.

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